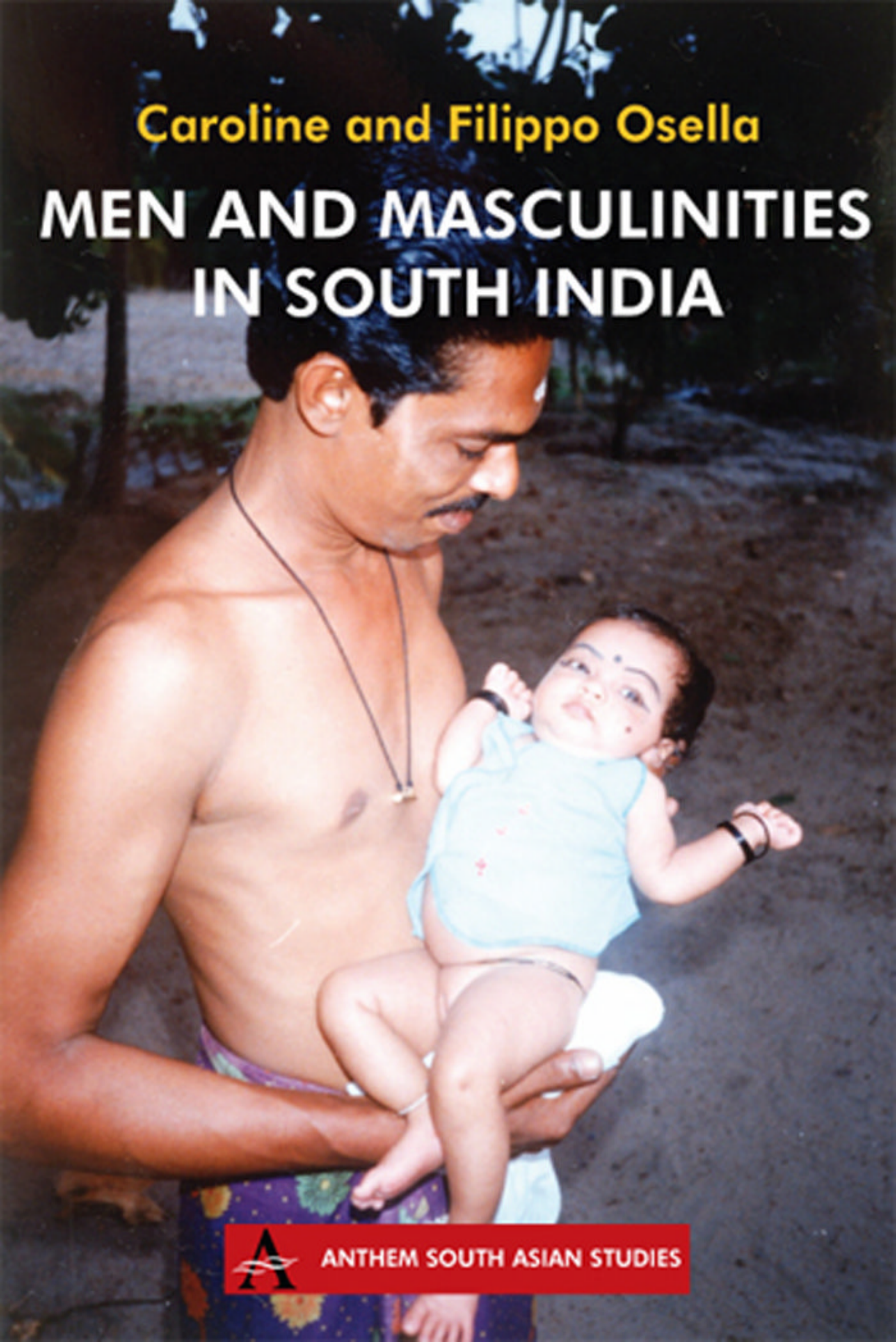
Caroline and Filippo Osella

MEN AND MASCULINITIES IN SOUTH INDIA



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Men and Masculinities in South India

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PREFACE/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is based upon several lengthy periods of joint fieldwork in a rural paddy-growing area of central Kerala (the *panchayat,* 'Valiyagramam') and some short fieldworks in Kerala's state capital, Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) from 1989 to 2002. We have been indebted over the years to several agencies, which have funded the research: the Economic and Social Science Research Council of Great Britain; the Nuffield Foundation; The Leverhulme Trust; the Wenner-Gren Foundation; the Society for South Asian Studies; and to our home institutions—the University of Sussex and SOAS, London.

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Note on transliteration: in line with increasing informality in transliterating Indian languages (partly due to the decline of the Indological influence on anthropology), we have asked our copy editor Mahalakshmi Mahadevan to transcribe Malayalam terms into their commonly used naturalistic Anglicized forms, which will be easily readable by anyone familiar with a Dravidian language. Thus, meesha will be more recognisable than mīśa.

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DEDICATION

This one's for you, kids! To our daughter Anna and our son Gabriele, with love and apologies for all the working weekends. We hope the trips to India make up for it.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Masculinities in South Asia

About this book

This book draws together work we have written over the last 15 years, which has been concerned with exploring masculinity in a south Asian context. The specific context we have worked in is that of a rural paddy-growing *panchayat* (which we have anonymized as 'Valiyagramam') in the central part of Kerala, South India. We undertook several periods of fieldwork here, from 1989 to 2001.[1] Here, we worked mostly among Hindus but also at times with members of the minority Christian populations (split between various denominations). There were no Muslim families in this village. Since 2002, we have shifted field-site and now work in Calicut town in northern Kerala. Again we are working among the locally dominant community (in this case Muslim traders) and again we are paying attention to ways in which objectifications of identity are projected, for example through the practices of consumption. What has become clear to us, since 2002, is the degree to which several themes found in south Asian ethnography generally and in our own earlier work may be highly specific to rural Hindu contexts. The continuing observance of some forms of untouchability and the belief that character and body-type are strongly correlated would be one (Osella and Osella 1996, 2000b). Yet it also strikes us strongly that certain other themes appear to cross-cut region and community and to be rooted in broader socio-cultural ideals: the practice of arranging marriages between young people who are putatively strangers to each other is one; the valorisation of male earning and the repudiation or ambivalence about female earning is another; the importance of generating children is a third.

With this in mind, we present here ethnography from the highly specific locale of Valiyagramam, where we find labouring, working and lower

middle classes and a handful of middle-class, professional or wealthy families; but our aim is to use this ethnography to think through some wider issues for analysing gender in South Asia. Where a circumstance is highly local (e.g. the reform of Kerala's matrilineal kinship systems) we mention this; and where it appears more general to the region (e.g. the dependence of masculine honour upon feminine virtue) we also highlight this fact. It is our hope then that this book will be useful both to south Asianists wanting to think about gender and especially about masculinity; and also to those interested in gender who are looking for an entry point into the south Asian situation.

In a moment, we will turn to review some work on south Asia and re-read it for what it can tell us about masculinities. In existing ethnography, the idea of a man as somebody who will marry a woman and become a good provider, a father, a husband (of whatever sort) goes uninterrogated. *Sannyas* (renunciation) is a highly exceptional, unexpected and generally disapproved-of choice. We will argue throughout this book that the production of the normative household through the institution of marriage is the ultimate outcome of processes of gendering. Because of this, it makes no sense in south Asian contexts to de-link the study of sexuality from that of gendering, as is being suggested in some branches of academic study (see e.g. Sedgwick 1990; interview with Gayle Rubin in which she discusses her position piece, 'Thinking Sex', in Weed and Schor 1997:15). While 'kinship' may not configure 'sexuality' in a north American gay men's leather bar, making 'sexuality' itself a valid stand-alone category of analysis, across South Asia it certainly does[2]—indeed, it most energetically does, through the control of young people's access to sex and the institution of arranged marriage. While earlier work on marriage, kinship, household and so on universalizes and takes marriage for granted, failing to theorize the 'necessity' for marriage as an institution, we are taking a more interrogative stance and trying throughout the book not to take for granted the normative as being the natural.

The production of a normalized and naturalized compulsory heterosexuality is what we find to be crucial to successful gendering processes and we will trace this process of production across several realms. Our argument will not surprise anyone working on gender just about anywhere in the contemporary world. Yet what will be interesting, we hope, is our exploration of the specific ways in which the conventional heterosexual couple is produced and framed within south Asian marriage. We will show how the 20th century has seen the production of a new hegemonic ideal family form at whose heart (and head!) stands the man of

substance—the man with financial resources, earning power, a network of dependents and, crucially, a wife and children. This is not Dumont's dharmashastric timeless 'householder' (*grhastha*) but is a thoroughly post-colonial and contemporary ideal, played out in arenas such as globalized consumption practices and ideas about 'love'. Discourses of 'choice' and 'love', like Anthony Giddens' triumphalist manifesto for contemporary relationships, at once make a fetish of individualism and freedom while utterly failing to discern or discuss the workings of the powerfully normative and narrowing (hence un-freeing) structures of contemporary heteronormativity. Nor do such totalising global visions perceive what virtue there may be in older or conventional forms of marriage and social attachment, rooted as such analyses are in contemporary neo-liberal political visions of person and society.

We will along the way mention some counter-currents to the contemporary bourgeois householder–housewife pair. While Dumont posed the renouncer—the marginal wanderer, contemptuous of mundane life and society—as the counter to his classic category of householder, we perceive another. This is a trend which is at once more subversive than the (marginalized and often mocked) celibate-wandering mendicant and at once also more widespread. It is the trend which resists contemporary globalising formulations of marriage as being necessarily about 'love', exclusivity and intimacy and as rooted in a naturalized heterosexual desire. This trend is what we might call the sceptical stream and it is tightly linked to the existence across south Asia of structures of gender segregation and a rich world of satisfying relationships between same-sex kin and friends (Muraleedharan 2002; George 2002; Chopra 2004; Rogers 2005; Nisbett 2005). As we move through the book, we will consider the existence of rich and parallel worlds of homosociality, which may sometimes mitigate the effects of the tightly drawn matrix of heterosexuality[3].

The replacement of homosocial bonds of affection—and sometimes desire—with 'modern' bonds of affection and desire within the context of marriage and a nuclear family leads south Asian gendering down a more narrow path. We discern the emergence of a more strictured and rigidly policed self living within the confines of a family structured by a neo-patriarchal hegemony (following Vijayan 2004). We are certainly no apologists for matriliny, and we emphatically do not take on the romantic view sometimes espoused that the loss of matriliny meant a loss of freedom for women, for we have heard many sorry tales of the excesses of the senior men who actually used to hold power in and run Hindu matrilineages—the *karanavan*s (Menon 1994; Kodoth 2001, 2005; Arunima 2003). Yet, as is now

clear, nor are we apologists for contemporary trends towards 'love after marriage' or 'small family'. We are then throughout taking issue with positions that would laud the rejection of customary structures of kinship and herald the advent of more 'pure relationships' and we are writing against ethnographic studies which would imagine the movement (of south Asians and others) towards globalized contemporary forms of marriage as liberatory and progressive, and as a matter of 'choice' (cf. Bouhdiba 1998).

In this chapter, we offer re-readings of some important monographs on south Asia and consider what they can tell us about south Asian men and masculinities. In Chapter 2, we will turn to think about how boys become men and whether 'men' is a status which can be achieved or a category one can join once and for all. We will shift to focus upon processes of earning and spending in Chapters 3 and 4 and upon the production of heterosexuality in Chapters 5 and 6. Chapters 7 and 8 will discuss two homosocial arenas and return us to our initial question of how boys become men and how masculinity is produced.

Men in South Asian Ethnography

When we look at south Asian ethnography with the intention of searching for an understanding of men, masculinities and masculine hierarchies, we encounter an ambivalent situation: men are certainly present—even too much present—in the ethnographic record, but they are generally not the explicit object of study, nor is much attention paid to analysing the gendering of their behaviour and their relationships with others. Men as a specific focus mostly appear in two particular and bounded sets of literature: that on the putative south Asian 'culture-bound syndrome' of semen-loss anxiety; and in historical analyses of masculinities under colonialism.

South Asian men have come under especial scrutiny in medical-anthropological and psychologically inspired literatures. Here we begin with a widespread assertion of apprehension revolving around men's relationships with mature women. In much literature, this anxiety has been taken as culturally specific—sometimes narrowed to Hindu men, sometimes left unstressed and presumably applicable to all south Asian men. It has often been identified in ethnographic studies of male attitudes towards women and specifically adult female sexuality, and is commonly said to be expressed in the form of the common semen-loss anxiety, the *dhat* syndrome found right across South Asia (e.g. Carstairs 1957; Kakar 1981, 1989). Sometimes, links are made between women and the Hindu goddesses, such that, for example, the fierce goddess Kali is interpreted as a male projective

fantasy of 'woman' as phallic and castrating (e.g. Gough 1955; Kondos 1986; Caldwell 1999). In Chapter 6 we will engage with this particular debate and take issue with its claims about masculine sexuality.

There is by now a huge literature on colonial masculinities. This work has been extremely useful in uncovering processes of domination and identity formation and has nicely explored some ways in which different hierarchies (race, sexuality, sex, gender) shape and are informed by each other (see e.g. Nandy 1980, 1983; Kanitkar 1994; Sinha 1995; McClintock 1995; Pandian 1995; Lewis 1996; Krishnaswamy 1999). It describes the effeminisation of—especially—the Hindu male and the redemption of certain other groups (such as the 'martial races') in the processes by which the British constructed justifications and stereotypes which would bolster colonial projects of domination and sought allies among certain groups of the colonized (Caplan 1995; Luhrmann 1996). Another strand of this literature examines the simultaneous production of a scapegoated and excessively masculine Muslim 'Other', and post-partition attempts to recuperate Hindu masculinity in the face of putative crisis through cultivation of the excesses of Hindu nationalism (Chakravarti 1988; Van der Veer 1994; Hansen 2001; Gupta 2002; Banerjee 2005). Throughout this book, we will insist that the colonial engagement was crucial in setting off a processes of reflexive and self-critical change in south Asian relationships of gender and kinship (Uberoi 1994; John and Nayar 1998). In particular, our ethnography indicates the degree to which a modern 'breadwinner' ideal has come to be the dominant mode of masculinity and reveals that under globalized consumption regimes, the anxieties inherent in this position are ever intensifying.

Apart from these two highly specific arenas, we find almost nothing in existing literature with a specific 'masculine focus'. Yet we can read between the lines of much existing ethnographic work to draw out a rich body of material suggesting some of the contours of south Asian men's lives.

Archetypes and ideals

It is interesting that some of the most influential books in the study of the region have been deeply concerned with issues of masculinity. To be sure, not explicitly or intentionally, but nonetheless centrally and to a usefully high degree of detail.

Dumont's famous structuralist study of caste points up the importance of certain positions within Hindu social hierarchies and explores the sets of oppositions that are claimed to bound Hindu thought and hence social life

(1970). The concern is with normative and dominant social 'types' and with stages in the life cycle as laid down in Hindu texts, such as the Laws of Manu and the Dharmashastra. While the figures posited as the two extreme opposites of the Dumontian hierarchy—Brahmin and Untouchable—are discussed as general casted statuses and as positions structured by their relations to the all-encompassing purity–pollution distinction, it is clear that the imagined actors understood here are generally male. The fourfold *varna* system of Brahmin (holy man), Kshatriya (warrior) Vaishya (trader) and Sudra (labourer), with Untouchables (today's Dalits) left entirely out of the classification as those 'beyond' clearly sets out for us four idealized models of male activity. It is not women here who are expected to be traders or warriors according to their birth caste, and as such we can take the four *varnas* as complementary modes of masculinity. Within this, Dumont has consistently argued for a clear consensus among Hindus about the hierarchical ranking of the four modes, with Brahmin as supreme, the head of the social body. The values of Brahmins—most notably purity—are Hindu society's dominant ones for Dumont. We can re-read this assertion for its gender implications, which would be that the Brahmin—though he may be poor or without modern education or worldly power—is held to embody the superior or hegemonic form of masculinity (following Connell 1987).

The ideal successive four stages of life (celibate student—*brahmacharya*, householder—*grhastha*, forest-dweller—*vanaprastha* and renouncer—*sannyasa*) are again explicitly concerned with the male life cycle; women appear only by virtue of their place in it. The young celibate student is, of course, expected to avoid the distractions held to be implicated in the company of women. The householder is a married man with children, at the service of and ruling over his family. The forest-dwelling third stage is supposed to offer a moment of contemplation to the ageing husband-wife pair, duties fulfilled, children now adult and married, as they retreat from the responsibilities of the home and begin to immerse themselves in the quest for spiritual nourishment. In the final stage before death, a man is imagined to slough off even his wife and stand entirely alone, as one who has now utterly renounced the mundane world and thinks only of God.

The figure of the renouncer is important to Dumont in another sense, as he suggests that only those who choose this role are truly able to live beyond the all-encompassing demands of the caste system and the deep concerns with purity and pollution which, for Dumont, form the bedrock of Hindu society. Again re-reading the material from our particular set of concerns here, the renouncer—the man who claims to stand alone, outside of society,

to bow only before God—is of course a highly masculine heroic figure, embodying many of the virtues commonly attributed to dominant males: autonomy, resolve, self-control, high-mindedness. For Dumont, values of renunciation, standing against the dominant world (of caste, hierarchy, groups) have nevertheless always exerted great influence on the whole of Hindu life and thought. This permeability into mundane life of the ideals of the 'individual outside the world' has been particularly reinvigorated since colonialism; renunciation has opened the door to individualism and—paradoxically—hence also to other aspects of 'western influence' (1970:236). The values of renunciation have been studied widely in Hindu (Burghart 1983), Buddhist (Carrithers 1983) and Jaina (Humphreys and Laidlaw 1994) contexts. Such values obviously imply a degree of ambivalence towards the world designated that of women—the home, children and daily life—and hence have implications for gendered relations. If it is true that renunciation is a value not limited to renouncers but shot through the entirety of Hindu society, then we might indeed expect to find a degree of antagonism towards women among men.

T N Madan's attempts to counter an over-emphasis on values of renunciation in the literature revolve around discussions of the figure of the 'householder', the man in the world (1982, 1987). Madan argues that the values of renunciation and austerity are not actually the dominant values of Hindu society, even among Brahmins. His studies of Kashmiri Pandits suggest that the value of renunciation is lived out in practical terms as a cultivation of practices of detachment and avoidance of enslavement even as a man engages fully in domestic relations and pursuit of wealth. The householder, Madan suggests, does not subscribe to the idea of worldly involvements as 'evil in themselves' (1987:3), but instead affirms 'a disciplined this-worldly life as the good life' (1987:3). While householder–renouncer has been the structuring binary in post-Dumontian analyses, the claims of these two to properly embody the dominant values of moral masculinity do not represent the entirety of the scene. Dumont's claims have been challenged by two other major paradigms. The first—a vast body of work which explores the importance of the king or the *Rajput* (the second *varna*)—stresses the existence of another form of high status and power not reliant on (Dumontian) Brahminical purity. The second—ethnosociology—we will discuss in some detail later.

In Dumont's framework, the temporal power of the king is encompassed by the sacred power of the Brahmin, leaving a clear-cut hierarchy of male roles; the entire realm of temporal power is degraded and inferior when compared to that of moral and spiritual action (1970). In Hocart's

alternative model, the king stands at the centre of all social relationships and is indeed divinized such that no clear distinction can be drawn between the worlds of *dharma* (moral authority and law) and *artha* (political power). From this perspective, the Brahmin may appear not as master of the universe and as encompassing all that is contained within it, but as a mere client or paid servant of the king (Hocart 1950; cf. Derrett 1976). In Dirks' ethno-historical reformulation, it is colonialism which cuts off the kings' power and hence contributes to Brahminical ascendancy (1987). Whether thinking about the worldly power of the king versus the spiritual power of the Brahmin, or in arguing for a melding of the two in divine kingship we are once again, we note, dealing with implicitly masculine arenas and statuses. Women in this literature are non-existent or act as props to male authority and as the means by which men achieve their particular form of power.

The historical lineaments of the kingly style have been amply mapped. Here what we find is a stress on power, honour and status. Kings required access to a wealth of symbols and rituals which would support their claims to relative status against other parties. Such props to power might include landed properties, temples and courtesans, all of which become foils for the display of what we recognize as a particularly masculine claim to command and control (Marglin 1985; Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 1992). Writing about Nayaka kings of the 16th–18th century, Rao et al elaborate a series of vignettes of royal life. One theme here is that of the 'unknown, unpedigreed warrior who fights his way into power and a kingdom of his own'; martial prowess is clearly essential (1992:7). Another attribute is that of abundant wealth and the willingness to spend lavishly. A third is a huge appetite for the sensual pleasures of food, music and so on; demonstrated (hetero)sexual prowess played a large part in this. One king starts his day thus: 'Holding her hand … he climbed slowly out of bed and, still filled with desire, set out … lips scarred red from love-bites … forehead smudged with sweat … revealing all these signs of passion … the king … entered his palace… The woman … is the courtesan Chitrarekha, the latest in a series of [the king's] necessary, daily conquests' (1992: 58). Pamela Price traces a shift in kingly styles across the 19th century such that validation of royal power through cosmic notions such as access to *shakti* (feminized power embodied in females) or claims to legitimacy through *dharma*, all enacted through temple rituals and honours, were gradually superseded in importance by access to cash and influential state officials. Yet, against Dirks and Douglas Haynes, she argues for a continuity in the principles of pre-colonial and post-colonial kingship and, indeed, contemporary political leadership. Who would be leader—a hegemonic male—must demonstrate

himself to be a well-connected man of substance who is prone to acts of largesse (Dirks 1987; Haynes 1991; Price 1996).

Something that tends to characterize much of the work cited above is that it attends to ideas of idealized statuses, which are implicitly statuses normatively to be taken by men. A deep-structural cultural archetype and a set of standardized rules are presented to us and it is not always clear, even in deeply empirical historical studies, whether any actual men manage(d) to live out fully the idealized demands suggested by the various roles. At the same time, the structuring work played by gender in forging these idealized roles is generally not acknowledged. The various competing concerns of rebirth and *moksha*, worldly prestige and command, wealth and progeny are explored as desirable or undesirable goals within generalized competing frameworks or orientations to the world rather than as gendered positions, which situate men in highly specific locations with regard to women, boys and girls.

Frédérique Marglin's study of kingship in Orissa is interesting here in its focus on the ways in which kingly power rests upon female powers. At the Jagannatha temple, female dancers (*devadasi*s) live devoted to the deity but are also central in the maintenance of the king's power. The king enjoys the *devadasi*s' services as dancers and courtesans and relies upon their participation in several kingly rituals. Marglin argues that, against Dumont's posing of purity–impurity as the overarching structuring opposition in Hindu society, the values of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are equally important. An event—for example, childbirth—may be impure yet valued as auspicious. Whether Brahmin or King is said to be dominant depends upon one's point of view at the moment; purity or auspiciousness may be the predominant value, depending on the circumstance. And if Brahmin men are masters of purity, it is women who are the bringers of auspiciousness into the world, by virtue of their unique and necessary link to the worlds of procreation, fertility and increase. Yet this is not a matter of separate worlds or competing views; the concerns and worlds of women and those of men cannot be so easily torn apart. As Marglin notes,

> 'According to the principle of the pure and the impure, women seem to be devalued, subjugated to the will of men, in a word, inferior ... In the hierarchical perspective of the … pure and impure, women are inferior to men. The principle of the auspicious and the inauspicious is non-hierarchical…It is difficult to say which principle dominates; both aspects of women are explicitly recognized in the culture' (1985:299/300).

Metonymically, this association of the feminine with progeny and auspiciousness leads to links to other valued realms, notably wealth: small girls and brides are harbingers of prosperity and luck in the family. Our anthropological readings on the joy at the birth of a son and misery to the point of abortion and female infanticide when no boy is conceived left us quite unprepared when we first went to Kerala to anticipate the degree to which small girls there are feted and petted, appreciated as little Lakshmis. We might have thought this a particularly south Indian phenomenon had we not seen that among Kerala's Gujarati migrants—a group strongly invested in patriliny, stranger marriage and joint families—girls were similarly valued (so long as the family also contains boys, of course). Boys are not subject to this type of elaboration about their person, not loaded with sacredness and the power to embody values for beneficence or maleficence.

Chris Fuller's examination of Dumont's claims for Brahminical autonomy and detachment, to be in the structurally superior position of encompassing all others while being encompassed by none, also makes a start in the direction of unpicking the actual gendered relations behind masculine archetypes and rhetorics. Among the Tamil temple priests he works with, as indeed among all Brahmins practising Hindu ritual, a husband and wife pair is required; a Brahmin cannot remain unmarried and hold full ritual status. While priests perform prestigious rituals in public temples, they rely upon their wives to prepare items needed for ritual, such as the food that will be offered to the deities. Fuller also touches on the gendering of male and female natures. As has been much explored, and as Marglin makes clear in relation to the king and the temple-prostitute, in Hinduism it is females who embody *shakti*, the energising power which enables action. Males embody the capacity for making form and order from this chaotic raw power when it acts upon matter. Fuller suggests that Tamil Nadu temple priests need to be married specifically in order to get access to *shakti*, thereby revealing Brahmin men's claims for detachment and self-sufficiency to be a form of masculine hyperbole (1991:30ff; cf. Fuller 1980). Susan Wadley has explored at length the question of *shakti* and how it relates to women. It is clear that male and female alike are considered incomplete and that even superior males—kings, Brahmins—need to access and incorporate *shakti* if they are to act effectively in the world (1975; Klostermaier 1989).

McKim Marriott's ethnosociological challenge to Dumont's arguments—a transactional as opposed to Dumont's structuralist model—has the merit of being concerned with the differentiated qualities of persons and the ways in which they act upon and influence each other, rather than offering a static and highly abstracted set of archetypes. Marriott argues that in Hindu

India people don't think of themselves and others as individuals (unified beings who are separate, each one from the other, and indivisible) but as dividuals. An individual is indivisible, something which cannot be divided; a dividual can. A dividual then is a person who is made up of lots of strands, is a person who can be divided, and is able to pass on parts of the self to others.[4]

The parts of the dividual self are composed of code-substance. Marriott argues that in India, actor and action are not separated; people are their actions, to a high degree.[5] Within the Indian person, as it is envisaged in Indian thought, argues Marriott, there is no separation of e.g. mind from matter, actor from action, code from substance. At the same time, entities in India are not either material or spiritual or emotional or ideological: they are simultaneously all of this, unified and having both material and non-material aspects (Marriott 1959, 1976, 1990). For example, heat has both a material aspect—it acts in and upon the physical world; and it also has a value aspect, in that heat is necessary for life, but too much heat is dangerous. Fire is not then a neutral element, but something physical, which simultaneously has a conceptual value. We have written elsewhere about the ways in which this framework does indeed fit our Kerala rural Hindu ethnography (Osella and Osella 1996; 2003). In Valiyagramam, if a person is of a certain type—let's say a low-caste leather-worker—then villagers feel that this information tells us something about both that person's body—it is impure, it is low-caste, it is hot and so on, and also about their character—they are impulsive, hot-tempered, interested in things of this world as opposed to high spiritual things and so on. Because codes, or moral values, are not separated from substances, or material natures, then a person's code—covering moral code, character, mental and emotional nature and so on—is not separate from their substance—the type of body they have. People have more or less gross or subtle code-substances according to their caste, age and gender, and are made up of different strands of code-substance, which have different physical properties and moral values. This has big implications for gendering. Women are often held across south Asia to be both bodily hot and lacking in self-control and so on; Brahmin men by contrast claim bodily purity and coolness and also to have characters that tend towards prayer and non-violence (Osella and Osella 1996; 2003). Yet while the implications of this type of analysis of the dividual self have been traced through fruitfully with regard to such diverse arenas as the house (Moore 1989), religious ritual (Freeman 1999), land and residence (Daniel 1984; Osella 2004), gifting (Raheja 1988) and marriage (Busby 2000), gender as such has rarely become a focal point of analysis. We will go on later in the book to show how a modified version of Marriott's framework

works very well in tandem with recent gender theory stressing the embodied and performative nature of gender. Thinking of a dividual self helps us reflect closely upon the actual processes of gendering, the ways in which gender is brought back to the body and the fact that gender is not unitary or stable (as Marilyn Strathern has found in a context far removed from south Asia, 1988).

The lives of men

Moving from grand theory to less generalising empirical studies, we do once more have several classic works which, while they do not claim to be specifically interested in gender nor to be thinking specifically about men as men, do focus upon worlds in which men loom large and social arenas that are shot through and structured by gender.

Mattison Mines' 1994 ethnography of Tamil personhood is replete with 'big' men—successful in business, office-bearers of public organizations, from prominent families and so on. He makes the point strongly that the exceptionalness and individuality of such men is predicated upon their rich and far-reaching networks among the wider community. He also addresses gender when he discusses the puzzling fact that 'both men and women are leaders in Tamil society … but eminent women are rare at local levels… consequently, what I have to say about …eminence in public life has to do only with men' (1994:17). Mines points out that most often, a woman who gains local fame does so because (for example) she is especially religiously devout, or has been the first woman to undertake some activity such as studying to a certain level. The public sphere Mines enters and describes, of receiving and giving honours, office-bearing, moving on in business, entering politics, endowing charities, is overwhelmingly a masculinized one.

This is true for the sophisticated Chennai, George Town Chettiars discussed by Mines as it is for the headman of Rampura village (Mysore District) in Srinivas' famous 'Remembered village' (1991, original 1976). Nadu Gowda, described in a chapter entitled 'Three important men', is an impressive figure. While 'the manner he wore the *dhoti* symbolized his conservatism in social and religious matters' (p. 54), Srinivas goes on to write that 'he was also an implacable enemy' who did not 'easily forget or forgive. He had power, influence and money, and he had the ability to plan his moves…' (p. 67). The headman's father—whose life-style 'was more ostentatious than that of his much richer and frugal son' (p. 68)—is even more a hyper-masculine character. 'He was large…he had a impressive moustache with twirled ends, which the older villagers regarded as a symbol

of beauty as well as manliness' (p. 68) and we are told that wealthy upper-caste land-owners like him 'kept mistresses' (p. 156–7).[6]

These ethnographies give a sense of styles and aesthetics associated to dominant men—almost invariably belonging to upper castes or dominant communities; what about those men who are subordinated to 'big' men as clients? Breman's long-term study of patron-client/debt-bondage relations in Gujarat (1974; 1985; 1993; 1994; 1996) suggests that the status of wage labourers is determined as much by caste as by their position as dependents, a position which, nevertheless, assures some degree of economic stability. And yet, De Neve demonstrates that Tamil weavers entangled in debt-bondage relations have strategies to make the best out of their employer's attempts to bind them and they have developed strategies to escape attachment. Given periodic shortages of skilled workers, they can sell their labour to other employers and shift away from a factory or owner they do not like (2005: 169ff; see also Osella and Osella 1996: 51ff). This indicates—as in most of the literature on Dalits—not only that subordination does not exclude agency but also that representation of the dominated as social inferiors might be altogether rejected. If upper-caste discourse in south India often infantilizes or feminizes Dalit men—Thurston (1909) reports that untouchable Kerala Pulayas were forbidden to grow moustaches—Rogers' recent Chennai ethnography shows how scheduled caste male college students see themselves as more masculine and sexually mature than their higher-caste counterparts, a hyper-masculinity which is cultivated through body-building and expressed through tales of alcohol drinking and encounters with sex-workers (2005).

Hierarchies of status that inform men's work relations in rural India appear to wither away in the Bhilai government-owned steel plant studied by Jonathan Parry (1999). Built at the height of Nehruvian modernization, labour here had not been recruited according to regional or caste lines, a recruitment strategy prevalent in colonial times, which led to the reproduction of 'primordial identities' amongst the industrial working class (see e.g. Chakrabarty 1989; Chandavarkar, 1994). The Bhilai plant, on the contrary, is a veritable melting pot where men forge intense friendships across barriers of religion and community. For Parry, it is not just the specific nature of production that generates solidarity amongst work-mates. More importantly, it is the success of the melting-pot model of Nehruvian modernity—where 'roles are…allocated to individuals on the principle of their formal equality of status; and competition for them is between individuals rather than collective identities' (p. 139)—which deters the emergence of communal chasms amongst the workforce.

Parry's sympathetic assessment of Nehruvian industrialization might be tempered if we consider the gendering of industrial work under modernity. Here, we see the reproduction of gender hierarchies not that dissimilar to those which characterize the sexual division of labour in rural India (see e.g. Kapadia 1996: 211ff; Busby 2000). When women do go to work in factories, it is often in particular segregated areas, niches, or in a manner that is circumscribed in comparison to male workers. The jute mill in which Leela Fernandes undertook her research employed 4000 workers, of which fewer than 200 were women. When we talk of factory workers, or workers in general in south Asia, we are overwhelmingly talking about men. While many women do work outside the home, the majority do not. And unless the job is one deemed suitable and prestigious—such as paediatrician—then the woman and her family are liable to stigma. Even the presence of a woman in an arena coded as masculine is suspect. Fernandes tells us, 'The concept of an upper-class Indian woman walking around a factory and conversing with workers … went against the grain of the social and cultural norms that define caste, class and gender. As the general manager said to me on my first day, "you can do it but it is not appropriate for you"'(1997:21; see also Sen 1999).[7] Occupying public spaces, working, earning and spending all come out as strongly masculine activities (Jackson 2000; Chopra 2004; De Neve 2004).

Men in the background

Another place where we glean material on masculinity is in—often feminist—ethnographies of women's lives. Here, gender is often part of the theoretical or motivational focus, so that issues of women's relationships to men are given importance, albeit of course here from the perspective of female respondents and with the goal of learning what we can about the status of women in south Asia. There is of course a whole slew of works on marriage and kinship. Some are more technical works examining the different ways in which the north Indian style systems work out and differ from south Indian ones. Briefly, 'north Indian' kinship involves patriliny and hypergamy; the world is divided into bride-givers and bride-takers and girls are thought of as sojourners in their natal family, brought up so that they can be given away along with dowry and thereby bring prestige and merit on their families—notably upon their fathers (e.g. Parry 1979). Often this goes along with a strongly patrilineal ideology, which would claim that a bride's body is transformed at the wedding so that she substantially becomes part of her husband's lineage (Inden and Nicholas 1977; Fruzzetti 1982).

The pattern in parts of the south India and Sri Lanka, where 'Dravidian' kinship has prevailed among many groups, is quite different, in that cross-cousin marriage or uncle-niece (ZD) marriage has been prevalent and we also find many groups that practized matriliny until colonial assault provoked reforms in the early 20^{th} century (Good 1991; Gough 1952, 1959; Trawick 1990; Busby 2000).

The opposition from a man's point of view between his sister and his wife has been a common theme (e.g. Bennett 1983). What is interesting in the kinship literature is how kinship as a system is generally described—as conventionally in anthropology—from a male ego's point of view (hence e.g. 'MBD marriage') while studies of marriage focus on the figure of the bride. This tends to give the erroneous impression that firstly, kinship systems are produced solely by and for the benefit of menfolk, while women are pawns moved around within them, and secondly, that the transformations of marriage mainly concern women. Of course, where patriliny and patrilocality prevail, as they generally do, marriage does not mean a change of residence nor of immediate social relationships for a man, but it is still a vital moment in his life and, as we will explore in this book, marriage marks his entry into a new and onerous status and set of responsibilities.

We also find that anthropological literature may have contributed to an over-statement of the features of south Asian styles of kinship. The classic north–south distinction (stranger brides versus cousin marriage) has been muddied by work showing that the north Indian ideal of separation of women from their natal kin may be far stronger than the reality, with (male) anthropologists often too keen to accept men's official and highly patrilineal versions of how kinship works (Vatuk 1975). Meanwhile, cousin marriage is only one possible—and highly unprestigious—option, with dowried stranger marriage outside the village the preferred type in the contemporary South (Osella and Osella 2000a:81ff). Monographs paying attention to masculine roles may have featured idealized models of behaviour as presented by men. Writing of father–son relations, Parry explicitly notes this: 'The stereotype of a father is of a rather stern, authoritarian and remote figure who must be treated with the greatest deference and respect' (1979:160).

Looking more generally at ethnographies of women's lives, we can read through the background something about men and their position in the world of women. We discern a shift in ethnographic tone over the 1980s and 1990s, whereby feminist female ethnographers, while staying true to the project of recording women's lives and noting the ways in which male supremacy operates, increasingly record complexity in gender relations and unevenness in projects of masculine dominance.

In 1979, Patricia Jeffery published the classic *Frogs in a Well*, a study of 'Indian women in *purdah*' in Old Delhi. Men here are figures of authority, holding power over women and children, and are the providers. 'The social segregation of the sexes has one very important implication…it is the task of the men to obtain employment to support the women and children who are their dependents' (1979:6). Men here are vigilant in their upholding of a social order which devalues women, debars them from many spaces and insists upon their role as limited to the domestic, yet women know that 'men' do not form a united group or homogeneous category. Jeffery reports stories of men who kindly teach their illiterate wives to read and those who ask their wives if any shopping is needed rather than waiting to be implored to visit the bazaar (1979:136). Jeffery found that 'too many children' rather than 'one husband' was the theme of most women's complaints to her. It was actually husbands' insistence upon more children, especially sons, that was women's most distinct problem: a woman with two daughters and only one son, advised by doctors to have a hysterectomy for health reasons, was obliged by her husband to undergo another pregnancy in the hope of a son. As another woman told Jeffery, 'Some men care more about having many children than they do about their wife's health' (1979:141). Where segregation and sharp role differentiation is the case, from men's point of view sons become essential—to carry on businesses, maintain a patrilineage and perform funeral rituals.

Yet Jeffery concludes that men, while they 'wield enormous power over the women of their own households', do not form 'a united interest group' (1979:167) and it is clear that the power men hold can be used to make their dependents' lives miserable or content. Elder brothers may encourage their sisters to enjoy themselves on a day-trip; grandfathers may insist that their grand-daughters be allowed to study. Young women wonder whether their husbands will be the sort to allow them freedom to visit their natal relatives or will treat them as prisoner in the home; whether he will be the type who loves and cherishes wife and children even in the face of difficulties or the type who takes them for granted and seeks divorce or a second wife (1979:136). Finally, Jeffery also notes that extreme segregation can be burdensome at times for men who are obliged to do daily marketing and chaperone women on their trips to buy e.g. dress materials. And, 'While bodily modesty and displays of deference accentuate the women's dependence on men, they can also be seen as signals of female fragility which enable …women to opt out of earning a livelihood' (1979:174). Finally, mutual dependence and affection tempers power: 'The women depend on the goodwill of menfolk for their maintenance, but the men too

rely on the women not to sabotage the system seriously. The economic power of the men is crucial but its exercise is checked by the possibility of retaliation by the women' (1979:171). Where men do appear as especially overbearing and aggressive is in their relations to non-related womenfolk, as when they harass women on the street (1979:153ff).

While Jeffery feels that her respondents have internalized much of the negative ideology devaluing women which surrounds them, and are rendered timid and without competence in many spheres, Raheja and Gold, in the preface to their 1994 *Listen to the Heron's Words* argue that submission, modesty, self-effacement and so on are experienced by women as bothersome poses which they are obliged to take. For this reason, women generally preferred to be together and away from mixed company. Women were at once 'freer in thought' than the writers had expected, 'their domestic influence more blatant' and not in the least 'ashamed of female bodily processes' (1994:xxx). They acknowledge that in just about any index of privilege—landowning, mealtimes and amounts, literacy, control of cash, bodily health, experience of violence—the needs and desires of women and girls are unquestionably subordinated to those of men and boys, while females' overall relative situation is worse (1994:xxxiii). Yet the bawdy and affectionate songs women sing open up to us a world of women's agency, mockery and subversion within apparently rigid gender frameworks. The songs also sing women's appreciation of the realms of sex and birth, illicit liaisons and both the pleasures and the tensions of the married state, all of which makes a sharp contrast to the 'official' versions of north Indian marriage and family life given in earlier kinship studies. And what is interesting in their analysis is the insistence that this is not a 'women's point of view' on the world, a subaltern and secret tradition in a segregated society, a compensatory narrative with no teeth; they insist that the jollier and less oppressively unidirectional folk perspective they outline is available to and shared by some men (1994:38, 71).

Margaret Trawick's ground-breaking 'up close and personal' ethnography of one Tamil family is woven around the central personality of Themozhiyar (Ayya), the man who introduces Trawick to Tamil poetry and later—through his own family—to Tamil society and culture. From the fine-grained details of daily life we understand the frictions and negotiations taking place between women and men, and how often reality deviates from the ideal. 'Ayya … taught about the ideals of Tamil womanhood … softness, meltingness, subtlety, mystery, modesty. … The women of Ayya's household, by contrast, were far from his ideal. They, especially his wife, for all the goodness of their hearts, were loud, immodest, short-tempered and

unbending' (1990:74). Ayya takes refuge in asceticism, poetry and the consolations of a homosocial sphere of fellow poetry-lovers and temple-goers. Trawick's book is important in its suggestions to us of the ways in which emotional lives can be lived in a diffuse and complex way, simultaneously within and beyond gendered expectations. In her 'cast of characters' in the family, she traces cross-cutting lines of affection and dominance, attachment and support, which are not always running in the directions we might conventionally expect. The heads of the household are elder brother Annan and his wife Anni. While Annan is described as 'unsure of himself' and 'easily persuaded', Anni 'takes orders from no-one'. The ascetic Ayya is married to Padmini, a hot tempered and rebellious woman who is devoted to Mohana, her sister-in-law. Even as Ayya despairs of his wife's refusal to embody the ideals of Tamil womanhood he has tenderly described (above) and withdraws emotionally from his wife, whose attentions are already engaged by Mohana, Ayya is concentrating upon 'building a financial base for his family'. Here, we have an extraordinarily complex set of joint family relationships and, crucially, an insight into ways in which men and women adopt, refuse and negotiate normative gendered expectations.

Sarah Lamb (2000) discusses ageing in rural Bengal with an especial focus on elder women. The issue of female 'heatedness' and relative vulnerability to pollution, openness to untoward influence and so on again surface here. Lamb chronicles her struggles to adapt to the practices of bodily discipline required of her if she is to avoid impurity and excess heat, and her astonishment when she discovers that men labour under a less stringent purity regime. Men are not considered as vulnerable as women to pollution, being 'brass pots' to women's 'clay' (2000:182ff). She also records, however, ways in which women subvert the 'rules', such as by pretending only to have urinated when in fact they have defaecated, so as to avoid having to bathe and change clothes. This recalls Raheja and Gold's suggestion that women's compliance with the restrictions placed upon them is based not on internalized self-devaluation or acceptance of moral schemas but upon pragmatic strategies of public compliance where necessary.

While we find yet again in Lamb's work a strong ideology of gender difference, female inferiority and vulnerability and reiterations of the need for women to be controlled by menfolk and seniors, that is not the whole story. It is clear that the position of the elder man is quite different from that of his son and that often when thinking about 'men' and their positions of dominance, we are really thinking about younger men. While young men move freely around the village, spend hours at leisure reading newspapers,

have spare cash to spend in the tea-shop, play soccer and go for picnics and care very much about their dress style (2000:192)—all while their wives and sisters are confined in the house, cooking and cleaning—old men live much more curtailed lives. They are simple in dress, often shoeless, with little or no economic responsibility or power and increasingly confined to the household (2000:207). Lamb argues that with age, women become more like men and men more like women—gendering then is not an even and lifelong process but something salient during youth, of hyper-importance during reproductive years, and gently tailing off once one's own children are adults and married.

Young men (not to mention Brahmins) also appear in this ethnography in unexpected roles: 'Villagers frequently praised the way one Brahmin man … cared for his very aged father with unfailing devotions until the day he died; Syam Thakur, I was told repeatedly, would himself take the excrement-covered sheets from his father's bed to be washed, four or five times a day if necessary, never complaining…' (2000:48). Meanwhile, from the point of view of ageing mothers, young men often appear as excessively attached to their wives and careless of conventional family age and gender hierarchies—not always, then, the autocratic patriarchs we might have been led to expect.

Reading through such works, what becomes clear are three points: firstly, that life-cycle is important and always undercuts any attempt to make grand claims about 'patriarchy' or 'the status of women'. The new bride in her husband's joint family home is positioned a world apart from a middle-aged woman in an independent household with adult children living nearby. The same then has to apply to 'men' and we must pay attention to the different moments in the male life and resist assumptions that 'men' as a category necessarily stand equally and evenly in certain power relations to women, girls and boys. Our second point concerns the subversion of or resistance to masculine domination which south Asian women sometimes practise. We read over and over of women joking about their menfolk behind their backs; over-salting the food; taking extended trips to their natal homes on pretexts of festival visits and returning only after the husband entreats or angrily insists. And thirdly, individual biographies and circumstances clearly allow for a variety of negotiations and specific profiles within households, such that 'men' do not always act in the ways expected of them by normative gender expectations. There may be core aspects of the masculine role which cannot be thrown off lightly and others which are more easily dispensed with if a married couple desire it so. Men may cultivate a façade of normativity while privately acting in unsanctioned ways.

Contemporary Men

There have recently been the beginnings of an exploration of men as men and of how masculinity is produced and lived in south Asian contexts.

Joseph Alter has done excellent work in his studies of how masculine bodies are configured and produced. He has written at length about wrestlers (1992) and their practices of asceticism aimed at increasing bodily vigour and strength. A central focus is diet: rich (and costly) foods such as ghee and almonds are eaten in huge quantities. Another is continence: semen is viewed by wrestlers as a valuable bodily resource, its spilling something which weakens and requires much time and rich food to build up again.[8] The resolutely homosocial nature of wrestlers' society and the masculine atmosphere at the wrestling pit is also explored. In his monograph on *Gandhi's body* (2000), Alter offers us a complex and ambivalent portrait of India's 'father of the nation'. As has often been pointed out, Gandhi perplexed colonial officials in his refusal to take on or approve of British (hence putatively dominant) styles of masculine power. Writers such as Asish Nandy have valorized Gandhi as promulgating 'soft' Hindu masculinity, which refused the British-style brutal subjugation and repudiation of the feminine but instead incorporated it into the self; androgyny here was superior to masculinity (Nandy 1980, 1983). Yet, as Karen Gabriel (2004) suggests, such feminisation would make Gandhi a deeply problematic national 'father'; as such, what he actually offers us is the spectacle of a form of masculinity which is so self-assured and superior to other gendered forms that it incorporates, nullifies and transcends the feminine. As Gabriel notes, 'the "adoption" of the feminine within the masculine affirms Gandhi and not women' (2004:285). Alter's study of Gandhi is part of the process of de-mystifying and scaling down the heroic figure of Gandhi; Alter explores the man's obsessions with control, his contorted relationships with his wife and his female disciples, and his deep concern with excretory processes. The impression we are left with is of Gandhi as implicated in extraordinary levels of complexity and ambivalence. Gandhi here is not at all the confident 'Indian' man of popular history, nor does he hold a coherent vision of personal and social political projects rooted in a commitment to personal androgyny and respect for women.

Steve Derné has written specifically about masculinity in his two monographs, one on men in the context of family life and one on men's cinema-going and relation to film (1995, 2000). Derné is resolutely convinced that ultimately we can and must talk in terms of 'male dominance' when dealing with gender in south Asia. He explores the ways

in which young men are subordinate to fathers and elder brothers, and the ways in which they in turn, exert—or anticipate exerting—their will over women. The picture he gives is fairly much a seamless one, in which family structures, religion, the economy—all aspects of society—exist to smooth men's paths relative to women and naturalize their claims to control and power. He writes, for example, that, 'men … still use popular culture to advance male dominance' (2000:9). While he acknowledges differences between men, especially in class terms, ultimately he discerns strong threads of violence and subjugation in gendering. In his first monograph, Derné groups men into four orientations: 'true believers', 'cowed conformists', 'innovative mimetists' and 'unapologetic rebels', according to their attitudes towards what he claims as the bedrock of Hindu men's expectations. This bedrock has four strands; Hindu men, Derné suggests, prefer to live in joint families, prefer arranged marriages, curb women's activities and restrict contact between husband and wife. Here he may be criticized on methodological grounds; the book is based upon interviews and as such we might expect to see men offering the official line and even exaggerating their own importance and power or their commitment to orthodoxy. But in his second book, based on a wider set of methods, he finds himself reiterating his earlier position. To quote him at length,

> '…the feeling that one lacks power to control one's destiny is not limited to the poor …middle-class and upper-middle-class men feel helpless in the face of hierarchical families, and impersonal economy and a frustrating bureaucracy…while films don't usually prompt men to rebel against oppressive authorities, films help men find a sense of power and control in their relationship with women … what viewers learn is that sexuality involves men using violence to force women into a sexuality that exists solely for men's pleasure'. (2000:164).

Sanjay Srivastava, in his new book, offers us a richly complicated set of arguments bringing together contemporary consumer cultures and sexuality and offering a quite different picture from Derné of Indian men's aspirations and orientations to the normative (in press). We will engage in Chapter 6 with his work, and here bring out only his major point, which is that hegemony is far from reached in the case of 'official' south Asian discourses on respectability, chastity and so on; subaltern subjects in particular may encounter a wide range of sexual practice, advice and attitudes in the context of popular consumer culture. Among the working and lower-middle classes, sexuality may be operating as a form of contemporary self-making

promising—on the cheap—freedom, entry into modernity and so on. Earlier, Srivastava explored the production of an elite group of men through the public school system, in his study of India's most prestigious boys' boarding school, modelled on the British system (1998), and produced a most useful edited collection specifically focused on masculinities and sexualities in south Asia (2004a).

Another recent edited volume (Chopra et al. 2004) provides us with short pieces from across south Asia, which do not add up to a coherent generalisable 'south Asian masculinity' but do explore some themes recurrent across the region. Discourses of masculine honour and its dependence upon female chastity is one, and authors here explore the tensions for men in trying to live up to the expectations of honour. Thomas Walle observes Pakistani young men shifting pragmatically between positive and negative evaluations of young women who transgress the tight conventions of purity and chastity, according to—in the end—whether they like a girl enough to think of marriage. Rigid binaries between 'good' and 'bad' women can be replaced in sophisticated contemporary urban contexts by a discourse of 'decency'—a subjective evaluation. The rejection of a now-undesired former girlfriend can be publicly justified among men by declaring her obvious unsuitability to become a chaste wife, while a girlfriend to whom a man is attached and who is a 'serious' marriage prospect can be rehabilitated, regardless if she has also moved dangerously near to losing her virginity (2004). Similarly, Mookherjee explores the negotiations and compromizes made by Bangladeshi men whose wives were doubly dishonoured by being raped and then publicly 'celebrated' as war-heroines in Bangladesh's independence war (2004). While male honour was certainly severely damaged, not all men reacted with angry repudiation of the wife; Mookherjee tracks the attempts by couples (with varying success) to put aside the trauma of rape and re-establish some sort of marital connection (2004). Men's pain and stigma when women's chastity is threatened is part of the story here, as is the way in which men police other men's reputations through insult and jibe. While this edited volume picks up many themes identifiable across different south Asian arenas of gendering, we are still waiting for monograph-length explorations of its themes, such as men's emotional relationships with mothers, wives and sisters; men's attempts to negotiate 'modernity' in business and anchor it to local expectations of family styles; men's reactions to new reproductive technologies; men's relationships to the iconic (such as Gandhi or the 'bandit' Veerappan).

An emerging literature on queer south Asia is growing out of two sets of concerns: policy and activist work around HIV and AIDS prevention,

concerned with the mapping of MSM (males who have sex with males—e.g. Khan 1996, 1997; Khan and Khilji 2002; Cohen 2005. cf. Reddy 2005); and the explorations undertaken in film and cultural studies (often by diasporic south Asians) of dissident or alternative gender and sexual positionings (e.g. Merchant 1999; Vanita 2002; Gopinath 2005). The emerging field of queer studies is beginning to shift the ways in which academics write about—for example—*hijras* (eunuch transvestite males) or friendship (e.g. Reddy 2005; Muraleedharan T 2002). Here, the emphasis is on writing beyond contemporary European categories which assume a clear binary of hetero and homo sexuality and acknowledging a more complex situation in practice (following Sedgwick 1990, see e.g. ed. Vanita 2002). Here, debates are raging over, for example, the extent to which it makes sense to talk of 'homosexuality' or even 'sexuality' in south Asia. On one side stands Shivananda Khan, founder of Naz Foundation International, an HIV and sexual health NGO. Khan is adamant that research right across south Asia by workers from his NGO suggests that 'sexuality'—as an identity, or understood as part of one's 'inner self'—does not exist in south Asia outside certain sections of the urban middle classes. Meanwhile, the 'gay' identity is limited to a handful of metropolitan activist/intellectuals. Rather than identity, Khan argues, sexual behaviour is what we find. Moreover, this behaviour is focused not on an object of desire but on oneself, and on the need for 'discharge', especially strong among men. Sexual acts do not here necessarily gender a person, such that a married man who seeks a male commercial sex worker in no way compromizes his masculine status. At the same time, certain people are gendered, but not within the terms of European binaries: rather, a 'nonce taxonomy' (following Sedgwick 1990) exists, of (e.g.) 'real men', 'effeminate men', 'penetrable men' and so on, within a clearly hierachical structure in which the most salient gendered pair is the *kothi–panthi*—the effeminized male and the 'real man' (e.g. Khan 1997; Khan and Khilji 2002; Bondyopadhyay and Khan 2006). This would echo what has been reported by academic studies in other areas, e.g. Brazil (Kulick 1998). On the opposing side stands Ashok Row Kavi, gay activist and champion of the position that 'gay' identities are—and should be encouraged to be—emerging in India. Kavi denies outright both the relevance of the '*kothi–panthi*' or 'effeminized male–real man', penetrated–penetrator' model and objects to attempts to generalize across 'south Asia', a region he claims is arteficial and spurious. Anthropologist Larry Cohen has recently published an account of the processes by which these two activists have come to be public figureheads, gathered camps of supporters around them and are

trying to influence academic, popular and medicalized understandings of Indian gendering and sexuality (Cohen 2005). If Khan is correct, we might expect to find a greater prevalence of and tacit tolerance of same-sex sexual activity than in societies that rigidly adhere to and police a 'hetero'–'homo' binary. Some do indeed suggest this to be so (see e.g. Patel 2002:239). In any case, the relationship (if any) between gendering and sexuality in India remains to be explored (Boyce in press).

Sexuality and Intimacy

We anthropologists have generally thought about—been obsessively preoccupied with—the institution of arranged marriage across south Asia, and there is a plethora of studies of kinship patterns and marriage rules. Another trope has been the (equally romanticized and vilified) 'joint family' and imagined south Asian family values as expressed and imposed upon individuals in the household. While we have worried about women's adaptations to the strictures of living as stranger-brides in the north Indian Hindu joint family, men's experiences as juniors, younger brothers, or new husbands have been thought hardly significant. Women's unhappiness in their husband's home (*sasral*), where they are expected to move with extreme circumspection, has been cited as motivations for separations. Studies of break-ups of joint families show us that actually there have long been strong tendencies to fission at conventional points in the household cycle, for example following the birth of the second child, and that while women are conventionally 'blamed' for separations, men's desires to found independent households are equally strong (e.g. Parry 1979:159ff; Srinivas 1991). Moreover, the 'joint family' itself is another idealized and highly sentimentalized construct. Lamb tells us, 'We have little or no evidence that the past really was more perfect, harmonious, and filled with joint families, submissive young women, and venerated elders than the present is ... no baseline or longitudinal data have been presented to support the assertions of rampant joint-family decline' (2000:93). Whether or not the joint family ideal was ever actually lived out by a majority of families, it is certainly the case that in contemporary south Asia many households comprise nuclear or extended nuclear families (with e.g. one aged parent or unmarried sister included), in which a single man is 'head of the home' and main earner.

Jonathan Parry has recently written in detail about the contrasting marital histories of a Dalit illiterate father (bullock driver, factory labourer) and his highly educated (BA, MA, B.Ed) and respectably employed (schoolteacher) daughter. While father Somvaru has been married five times (besides also

having had several affairs and a few casual illicit liaisons), daughter Janaki has rejected the agency of elders and wider family in choosing her spouse and has remained true to what she apparently sees as the love of her life. She adamantly refused the arranged marriage set for her at the age of 14—by various strategies and some lucky circumstances—and managed to hold off both her and the promised bridegroom's family for years, as she took matriculation, degree and then master's degree. Janaki managed eventually to make her will prevail, as she married the partner of her choice—a local boy with whom she had, for six years, a semi-clandestine attachment, who had been first a college class-mate and later a fellow-teacher and neighbour. Parry compares the remarkable difference in attitudes to marriage between the father–daughter pair and attributes the contrast to class positioning, whereby the middle classes—which Janaki has undoubtedly entered—are exposed to and adopt a new ethos of marriage. Compare the two:

In Somvaru's view, marriage is 'above all an institution for the bearing and raising of children, and for the management of the household economy'. Moreover, 'Exclusive proprietary rights in a woman's sexuality were not stressed by the 'traditional' ideology of marriage … nor was the idea that marriage had very much to do with intimate companionship, emotional empathy or shared tastes' (2004:311). ''The communion of souls' is not what marriage is about' (2004:309). Parry is much struck by Somvaru's warm admiration of the 'cold brain' of one neighbour, whose wife left him for his best friend. The deserted man did not make an angry scene. After a couple of days, the best friend's wife moved in with the abandoned man and the two swapped couples sanguinely got on with their lives. 'Nothing was ever said about it between the two men and they continued their friendship as though nothing had happened' (2004:311). Parry also chooses to highlight the fact that when talking about his own life, Somvaru does not speak of emotional aspects but more usually practical and financial ones, while noting that Somvaru also attributes similar motives to others, such as the wife who left him but has lived to regret it because her new husband was not such a good provider.

Janaki by contrast neither is nor aspires to be 'cold-brained', but is strongly emotionally engaged. Parry argues that for those of the next generation who have experienced social mobility, 'marriage is rapidly changing its meaning. A woman's sexuality is certainly not for sharing, divorce is increasingly discountenanced, and a new companionate ideology makes the conjugal bond the object of much greater emotional investment. No longer merely a matter of the satisfactory discharge of marital duties, it is increasingly seen as a union between two intimate selves and carries a much

heavier emotional freight' (2004:312). As a telling index of the differences, 'While in Somvaru's old-style village house there is no separate space for the couple, Janaki and her husband have a private bedroom, dominated by what in village eyes is almost a pornographic object—a large double bed' (2004:312).

Parry appears to remain ambivalent as to whether these changes are a good or bad thing for the parties involved: on the negative side, he notes the increasing burden of expectation on the spouse, and the near impossibility in contemporary society of terminating an unsatisfactory relationship and finding another. But he also seems to approve of the general shift towards greater stability and 'intimacy': he notes that while Janaki and her husband have arguments, they are strongly engaged with each other, whereas in Somvaru's house there is not much communication between spouses; he cites approvingly Giddens' argument that intimacy leads to equality. Parry also frames the shift in attitudes to marriage alongside other shifts conventionally troped as markers of 'progress', such as the weakening of caste *panchayat*s or the coming of literacy. Parry's wider work on the social transformations associated with workers' entry into Bilhai steel plant explores a series of such shifts in a tone that suggests his support for modernising projects of self and society (1999a, 1999b).

Parry also draws an opposition between the pragmatism of the older generation, for whom financial considerations were paramount, and the expectations he discerns among younger people that marriage is not primarily pragmatic but is about love, conjugality and intimacy. Somvaru tells Parry about his ex-wife's regrets at having deserted such a good provider. Parry notes laconically, 'Not his good looks, sexual prowess or charismatic personality, note, but his ability to provide', suggesting then that this is an insincere and instrumental approach to choice of marriage partner (2004:297). But when we think about Janaki's refusal of her rustic arranged-marriage partner and her holding out for her chosen spouse—educated and employed as a teacher—we can discern a similar concern at work here for a husband who will be a better provider and a more capable and ambitious father for any future children. We will suggest throughout that a man's abilities as provider have been and continue to be at the centre of his marriage chances and of his masculine status (Jackson 1999). Laura Ahearn's recent study of shifts away from arranged marriage and towards love marriage in Nepal suggests that 'love' and 'life success' are very much tied together in the search for a suitable spouse (Ahearn 2004). The bottom line of 'love', whether it is permitted before marriage (as in the Nepali case) or expected to blossom after marriage (as in Kerala) is still, we find, in

Parry's words, 'not … good looks, sexual prowess or charismatic personality, …but … ability to provide'.[9]

Shalini Grover's recent PhD thesis takes issue with the idea, expressed in Parry's article, that greater intimacy and 'love' necessarily go along with greater marital stability and intolerance of divorce. Among low-caste, low-class Delhi slum women, 'traditional'-style arranged marriages, in which men provide and women keep house—and in which both parties pragmatically expect practical advantage rather than 'love'—are entered into as 'primary unions' (Grover 2006). As in Parry's ethnography of Somvaru, such unions may be broken if unsatisfactory and a series of 'secondary unions' of choice made. Arranged marriages then have escape clauses. Such unions also permit female autonomy from the husband and the duties in the woman's own household, in the form of sanctioning customary and extended visits to natal kin. Women in such marriages always have the right to support from their kin in cases of marital dispute. By contrast, 'love marriages' may result in less support from kin, and tend on examination to be no more democratic than 'traditional' marriages. Giddens' suggestion that 'love' leads to 'equality', cited approvingly by Parry, simply does not stand up to scrutiny. Women generally have less freedom to manoeuvre and bargain their position in the household and certainly have less chance to divorce if they choose 'love marriage'. Grover's ethnography then challenges two schools of assumptions: that which sees high-caste and middle-class women as especially strictured by marriage, while claiming that low-caste labouring women enjoy more autonomy and affection in their marriages; and that which follows Giddens' grand claims for the contemporary democratisation of relationships while valorising the contemporary growth of the neo-liberal value of 'individual choice' and taking satisfaction in the withering of structures such as kinship or obligation.[10] We will throughout this book return over and again to the theme of men in marriage and what marriage means for men. But first, we will begin in our next chapter to explore what actually it takes to 'become a man' and find oneself in the position of being marriageable.

Notes

1. See Osella and Osella 2000a.
2. If we accept at all the existence of the category 'sexuality' in south Asia—an argument we will not engage with here (see e.g. Cohen 2005).
3. In our experience, men's entry into domesticity is compulsory, while ideas of morality and responsibility weigh so heavily that men's homosocial worlds only very rarely display the outright contestation of domesticity claimed to be inherent in

other ethnographic locales—see e.g. Wilson 1973; Papataxiarchis 1991.

4. While we take on many aspects of the ethnosociological model, we do not take on the claim that it describes a specifically Hindu way of thinking about personhood. In this we agree with Strathern 1988; Busby 2000; Lamb 2000.
5. This may depend upon the specificity of the relationship and action. It may be that only certain transactions hold the potential for the transformation of the self (Good 1982; Osella and Osella 1996).
6. We are reminded by Gloria Raheja (1988) that the 'centrality' of 'big' men in the public sphere might not be simply an expression of their political or economic power, but can have an important ritual dimension. So the dominant Gujars of an Uttar Pradesh village maintain their own well-being, prosperity and status (as well as that of the village as a whole), by endowing, as *jajmans*, gifts (*dan*) containing sin and inauspiciousness to Brahmins, Kamins (client service/artisan castes) and affinal (see also Osella and Osella 1996).
7. cf. Radhika Chopra's discussion of the field and the street as masculine arenas of work and leisure which may or may not be penetrated by women, depending upon context and time (2004).
8. This reflects classical Hindu thought on the body; Francis Zimmerman has traced the textual elaborations of such ideas (1987).
9. Sanjay Srivastava argues, 'One way of thinking about the ideas of romance and love that congregate in the present context is that they elaborate a narrative for the 'future development" of the individual; they point to the discourse of agency that is connected to the 'economic' but not reducible to it' (2004:202). While certainly not simply reducible to economics, it is clear that a tight relationship exists between economic conditions and social attitudes towards individualism, choice, 'love'.
10. See Henrike Donner 2002 on contemporary middle-class metropolitan negotiations of 'choice' and 'love' with familial expectations.

CHAPTER 2

How to Make a Man?

Introduction

We begin with a tantalising question: how do you make a man? This chapter deals with some apparently unproblematic ethnography of processes by which boys are 'made' into men—male initiation rituals, practised across south Asia, among Hindu middle and higher castes. This ethnography prompts us to reflect on classic approaches to gender and maturity, such as theories that stress the importance of social role in making gender. Such approaches take us part of the way but they are not helpful across the board. Firstly, only certain communities practise rites of passage, and secondly, we sense that gender is not amenable to one-off 'achievement'. Lately, following the influence of several theorists, but notably Judith Butler, anthropologists have come to think of gender as more precarious and less straightforward than a status attained.

Societies and cultures often deal with processes of physical maturity, growth and decay through what are commonly called 'rites of passage', following the French turn of the 20th-century anthropologist Arnold van Gennep. As rituals that deal with transition from one social status to another, rites of passage are often explicitly tied to physiological or maturational milestones in the life-course such as birth, puberty or death. Van Gennep (orig. 1908) undertook the sort of vast cross-cultural survey based upon secondary sources that was common for the proto-anthropology of the time, before the 'discovery' of fieldwork. From pregnancy and birth, betrothal and marriage, through frontier crossings, changes of seasons, incorporation into a new social group and funerals, Van Gennep delineates a basic three-part structure in all these transitions. Firstly, there comes a 'separation' from the old state or original status—a person or thing is set apart, removed from the rest of society and from day-to-day life; then comes

a 'marginal' period in which the subject of the rites is neither one thing nor the other—he/she does not belong to the old order or status, nor has he/she entered the new. This stage is marked by signs of marginality and might lead to a longer 'liminal' stage in which the subject remains, for greater or lesser time, in a sort of suspended animation outside of normal life. Finally, there are the rites of re-incorporation, which returns the subject to society and marks him/her as belonging to a new group or having a new status.[1]

These approaches reflect a preoccupation with social role, the idea of people as actors in predictable and rule-governed worlds, inhabiting particular well-defined statuses and performing in set ways, living according to sociological norms. It is therefore unsurprising that it is this approach that was taken up widely in early analyses of gender by those who found it useful to think in terms of gender roles (see e.g. Rosaldo 1974; Llewelyn-Davis 1981). Although the idea that people more or less consciously act out roles or fit into clearly recognisable categories—young woman, mature man—has come under fire (much more on this later), the approach has retained an allure and can be found as recently as 1990, with Gilmore's cross-cultural survey study on how 'boys' become 'men'. The issue, from the male point of view, is presented in these types of analysis as a universal 'problem' of masculinity: the need for separation from the mother and the world of women. Clearly defined social categories—'boys', 'women'—are presumed to exist and people are seen as existing within social expectations that they will fit into a role or status belonging to one such category. The process by which male separation from women and girls is effected may be traced, via psychoanalytic theories, at the ontogenetic level, where it involves psychic separation from Mother or development of the masculine 'dread of women', following Karen Horney; or, via socio-cultural studies, at the phylogenetic level, where it is expressed in terms of joining a category of not-women (see e.g. Stoller 1968; Chodorow 1978:106ff, 174ff; Chodorow 1989:34ff; Gilmore 1990: 26ff, 229ff; Pleck 1987:29ff). Male initiation rites then address the 'problem' of masculinity and the task of separation, often by claiming to achieve the birth of 'true men' through the symbolism of a second birth to a male parent (e.g. Lewis 1980; Barley 1983).

Turning to south Asia, certainly the local presentation of Brahminical initiation is explained by senior men in exactly these terms: as a second birth to a male parent, which removes young Brahmin males from women in general and specifically from the taint of birth pollution passed on by the biological mother. Among south Asian Hindus, only 'twice-born' castes are entitled to practise these rites of initiation; in Kerala, with its near absence of twice-born castes and preponderance of lower (*sudra* and *avarna*) castes, this

effectively means that initiations are an exotic rite confined to an elite minority group—Brahmins. And what is particular to the Brahminical model of 'true men' is that it conflates a more widely shared cultural ethos of masculinity that stresses power, autonomy and control with specific Brahminical practices. Brahmins attempt to represent themselves as the only true and perfect men, because they have not only undergone rites to remove the taint of feminized birth pollution but because they claim that they alone can achieve the highly masculinized goal of total mastery and control of raw power (*shakti*) and the self.

Brahmin Initiation

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, initiation involved many personal restrictions and three years' full-time learning, but modern exigencies such as school (for the boys) and paid employment (for the adult men) have meant that the process had to be simplified and abbreviated.[2] During our spells in Valiyagramam, all eligible boys underwent initiation, all the Brahmin men and older boys of the village had been through the process, and the process seemed likely to continue well into the future, albeit in a modern attenuated form. When a baby boy was born to Narayanan Nambuthiri, he told us that he was already looking forward to the day he would arrange *upanayanam* (initiation) for his son. In North India, many Brahmin families have dispensed with the initiation altogether, collapsing it into marriage preparations and reducing it to an investiture with the sacred thread on the pre-wedding night (personal communication, J. Parry). Valiyagramam's Brahmins appeared to be unaware of this, voicing fears that it was only in Kerala that degeneration had taken place and believing that 'in the North' Brahmins continued to take full initiation. Such reduction in teaching and ceremony was sorely lamented: 'We know we're not doing these things properly any more, but the boys have to go to school and it's difficult to find *gurus* who can spare the time. What can we do?'

All Hindu *savarna* babies are born as Sudras, within Hinduism's fourfold *varna* scheme: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. The first three are born Sudra, but are entitled to initiation, which then makes them 'twice born' and full members of their *varna*. In Valiyagramam Brahminhood is conferred on males only by virtue of performance of a succession of *sodhasa kriyas* or *samskaram*s—life-cycle rites such as first rice meal, first haircut, marriage and so on. Our focus here, initiation, is perhaps the most important, being the specific set of rituals that explicitly transforms a boy into an adult Brahmin: an adult male uniquely qualified (by belonging to a

Brahminical caste *(jati)* and participating in its rituals and the transmission of sacred and esoteric knowledge) to perform certain Hindu rituals on behalf of his own family or—when acting as paid priest—for others.

On an auspicious day at an auspicious age (age five, seven, nine or eleven) *upanayanam*, (meaning literally 'auxiliarly eye'), the initiation into learning, should be conducted for all Brahmin boys. When a father decides to perform *upanayanam* for his son, a *guru*, known as the 'second father', is appointed to put the sacred thread on the boy, together with the *tol* or *krishnamrigam*, a deerskin cross-belt. The belt is a sign that he has entered his three-year *brahmacharya* or period of celibate studentship. The *tol* is a piece of skin, which should be cut and removed immediately at the moment of slaying a Malabar black deer (bought from specialist contraband dealers since the black deer is a protected species). Indologists interpret the *tol*, in line with Vedic birth symbolism, as the placenta, and as uniquely associated with Brahmins (Kaelber 1976:358; 1978:57; Smith 1986:70). Valiyagramam's Brahmins were either unaware of this fact or unwilling to offer up such a piece of esoteric knowledge. They offered a different set of associations, linked to the power which Travancore (southern) Malayalis often attribute to the North and to the power which they, in common with other south Asian Hindus, attribute to the forest. As the *tol* comes from Malabar, 'north side', it participates in the power attributed to that region; the deer, moreover, as a prototypical animal of the forest, is full of the hill-forest's raw power (*shakti).* Brahmins explained to us that skin from a dead deer, apart from being pollutant, would also not work; a *tol* must be taken at the very instant of death. Therefore, the *tol*, we can assume, metonymically passes to the initiate some of the living deer's qualities, particularly its pure (since forest-derived) power. If the textual birth analogy is followed, then the *tol*, as placenta, sustains and gives substance to the initiand during his long initiatory period, which is then like gestation (Kaelber 1976:355).

For the initiates, the *brahmacharya* period also acts as a symbolic sojourn in the hill-forest, the sacred space continually referred to in Hindu lore as the place where mythological heroes, deities, and *swamis* or holy men retire with their *guru* to meditate, learn, and receive *shakti*. (In Chapter 7, we will again turn to the question of how men take power from the hill-forest.) During *brahmacharya,* the initiand meets daily (after school and at weekends) with his *guru* to take instruction. Wearing only the deerskin cross-belt, sacred thread and loin-cloth, he will memorize at least parts of the particular sacred text (*veda*), which 'belongs' to his family and will learn how to conduct Hindu worship or *puja,* including the use of sacred formulas (*mantra*) and sacred gestures (*tantra)*. He will also be subject to certain restrictions, such as

sleeping on the floor, not cutting his hair, removing all clothing except the genital-covering strip of material on entering his own compound and so on. This last restriction is particularly resented by the boys nowadays, as they are terribly ashamed at having to go around virtually naked. In the photograph album of Sankaran Nambuthiri, there is a picture of his twin sons taken during their initiation period, which the boys have doctored, by drawing in shorts on themselves with a felt-tip pen.

These restrictions, together with the continual wearing of the deerskin cross-belt (*tol*), act on the boy as training in self-discipline, as public signs to remind him and others of his initiand status, and as tools of domination that attack his former self. With uncut hair, no bed but the floor and a host of other prohibitions upon him, he is marked as something between an ascetic and an inferior, dead or non-person. This is not simply a change in external status attendant upon achievement of esoteric elite masculine knowledge, but is a change effected through the disintegration of the original person and the production of a new subjectivity. Initiation techniques are able to do this by working directly upon a boy's body, marking and depriving it. Because his body is simultaneously him-self, (since we both 'have' and 'are' bodies), and that which stands at the interface of the 'Outside' and the 'Inside', of himself and the world, action upon it ensures that he (the initiand) is unable to remain external to the experience of initiation, but must plunge himself into it. He will internalize at least some of the rules that are being taught to him and will undoubtedly find himself marked by the experience. As Elizabeth Grosz points out, it may often be more useful (following Foucault) to look at power as a material series of processes, which marks and brands bodies, rather than as ideologies, which effect consciousness (in Threadgold and Cranny-Francis 1990). In a recent collection re-evaluating 'rites of passage' in East and Southern Africa, several authors argue against approaches that seek to interpret symbolism (cryptological, semiotic), demonstrate patterns in ritual thought (structuralist), or link up ritual to social structures (Durkheimian). Instead, they insist firmly upon an appreciation of the importance of ritual's work upon the body as meaningful and transformative in itself, not as a referent for 'society' or 'language', for example, but as a concrete referent for the material world of blood, fire, game animals and so on (see Moore et al. 1999:6ff; Kaspin 1999; Broch-Due 1999). And looking back through our notebooks, we do notice that Malayali Brahmins' explanations of initiation rites continually stress the bodily markings and physical deprivations imposed upon initiands as important in making them into Brahmins. Mastery of ritual knowledge is also important—memorising *mantra*s, learning *puja*—but this is not

disembodied cerebral knowledge, rather it is sensually transmitted and an acquired knowledge-skill that materially alters the person (cf. Marchand 2001; Hsu 1999).

At the end of the three years sojuorn 'in the hill-forest', the deerskin cross-belt is removed and a new three-stranded sacred thread is given, in the *samavartanam* or 'bringing to life' ceremony. Some say the three strands represent the Hindu trinity of Shiva, Brahma and Vishnu. With the sacred thread across one shoulder and around his chest, we can understand that the boy is dressed in and protected (encircled, sealed) by the power of these three male gods. He is from now on considered a full Brahmin, able to perform the full range of sacred duties, and accordingly considered ritually adult. Like other Brahmin men, he can recite the protective *Gayatri mantra* alone each morning, for his own individual benefit. 'There are no more functions needed for him now until his marriage, and when his wife becomes pregnant he will do all the rituals necessary for her and later for the child', Krishna Nambuthiri explained. There is a sense here of status achieved: in discourse, the boy becomes unequivocally Brahmin and masculine, utterly different from non-Brahmin men and from women, including Brahmins. He is putatively the most perfect form of human being. Taking the thread is second birth, and it is what differentiates adult Brahmin males—the twice-born, the most perfect form of human beings—from the rest of society.[3] The youthful initiate into full Brahminhood is drawn into the world of ritual activities monopolized by adult Brahmin men.[4] He receives new eyes, is touched by the power of the forest, and is actually removed from the world of women through re-birth with only one (male) parent—the *guru*, his second father.

Unlike Nayar, Christian and Izhava men, who (except in cases of hardship) will prolong their education and enter into productive work at the earliest at the age of 21, and for whom marriage and paternity in their late 20s are the first concrete and publicly acknowledged steps out of *payyan* (boy)-hood and towards adult status, the initiated Brahmin boy of 11 is equal to his elders in the arena of ritual and thus able—like men from the agricultural labouring classes or from Muslim trading communities—to engage in the adult world of paid work. Father and son teams are common: in this way, the boy finishes and polishes his skills, and learns any idiosyncratic additions to the standard *puja* that are practised in his family. Despite the stress laid on correct and exact duplication of ritual, which sometimes leads to assumptions that procedures are standardized across India, individuals and families have their own distinctive styles, and there is considerable room for innovation and improvisation within the 'set pieces'

of ritual work (cf. Fuller 1991). This parallels the situation among artisan castes, where the shared and standardized manuals, techniques and styles work together with local, familial and individual interpretations or embellishments, and fathers pass on to sons some specialized skills.

Nobody thinks it odd to see an 11-year-old Brahmin boy carry the goddess when she goes out around the village, nor would anyone protest if he comes to perform the rituals (*puja*) in their family temple; he is as good as any other Brahmin, a qualified specialist who has earned his status by his difficult three years 'in the forest'. The power (*shakti)* of the forest has been seized and incorporated via the deerskin cross-belt, while at the same time the neophyte receives the necessary instruction to acculturate, socialize and tame the raw power, making it his own. This new status is then marked for all to see (by the sacred thread) and confirmed both by his ability to engage in the adult, masculine world of *puja* work, and by others' acceptance of his fitness to do so. The Brahmin boy then appears to shift easily into manhood, by undergoing a semi-public rite, which dramatizes his new self and in which he is instructed in his new responsibilities. Of course it should not be forgotten that as a Brahmin he will find himself after initiation moving to the top of a hierarchy, certainly that of Hindu ritual life and to an extent (even nowadays) also of the social hierarchy. Though he may be only 11 years old, a Brahmin boy (at least in rural areas) will find older men of lower castes deferring to him, for example, in the terms of address used towards him. We find that even in the 1980s–1990s, non-Brahmin adults preferred to use a respectful form (e.g. *ningal*, first person singular) towards a Brahmin adolescent rather than the disrespectful form (i.e. *ni*, second person singular) usually used towards juniors. His status as one who has left behind the world of childhood and irresponsibility, and begun a man's work in the adult world, is apparently unassailable.

Status Achieved?

The fairly clear-cut picture that emerges from the above is how the rituals are presented by Brahmins—as effecting one-off transformation within the person. The male person here, then, is unequivocally and essentially masculine—stripped of female birth pollution, set apart from domestic life and womenfolk, offered esoteric knowledge by senior menfolk, and subject to rituals available only to males. Yet within this strong local version of achievement, which encompasses both caste status and gender, there is creeping recognition of other factors undermining the Brahmin man's claims to superior masculinity. Firstly, there is the difficult question of

Brahmin womenfolk: women's status was disputed within the community—depending upon the informant, a female is thought to attain Brahminhood at the age of three after her *kshauram* (first hair cutting) ceremony, when her brother is initiated, on her wedding day, or during the *pumsnavan* (drinking tamarind juice ceremony, done before the 90th day of her first pregnancy), or never, remaining always a Sudra, because she is still 'once born'. In traditional Brahminical discourse, freely articulated by the older and by the more orthoprax men within the community, Brahmin women who fulfil their *dharma* (righteous action) can hope not for *moksha* (salvation), but to be re-born as men. Many progressive-minded men, finding this doctrine embarrassing, avow that women can also achieve Brahminhood and *moksha*; they remain unclear about how this can occur.

These uncertainties and ambiguities highlight an important aspect of Brahminhood itself: that it claims to be synonymous with maleness. From a male point of view, femaleness can be sloughed off in initiation by removing birth pollution and replacing the biological mother by a ritual father, making the child ritually born of two males. Yet females can not be so easily written out of the social picture. Women are necessary for the community's continuance, while a wife is an indispensable ritual partner (Fuller 1980; Fuller 1991). From a female point of view, a woman is certainly of lower status than her husband, the initiated ritual specialist who has been reborn as a Brahmin; yet as a Brahmin she considers herself different in another way—superior, less polluted—than other womenfolk. While respondents would agree that 'technically' she is a Sudra, a once-born who has not undergone the initiatory second birth, in practice, a Brahmin woman is treated as a Brahmin. This severely undermines the ritual's claim to be the only way of effecting and conferring Brahminhood, suggesting the acknowledgement of essentialized and inborn qualities. If Brahminhood is not made by the rite but is natural, an essentialized caste status akin to 'race', perhaps so too then is masculinity, making the rite's claims to purge the male body of residual female pollution redundant. We are reminded here of the outcome when a Sepik society men's cult was destroyed practically overnight, under the influence of incoming Christianity: the men revealed their hitherto guarded secrets to the womenfolk; they destroyed cult paraphernalia; they stopped cult practices. Gender relations shifted after the cult's destruction, but did not of course disappear; men continued to be 'men', even without initiation, and simply shifted to other arenas for their aggressive performances of hyper-masculinity (Tuzin 1997). For now, Brahmin men continue to hold to their esoteric and gender-specific knowledge and claim initiation rites as essential to man-making, while

allowing that actually the rite is ineffective in the absence of many other things—biological sex, correct caste birth status, continual performance and so on. These anomalies are, as we would expect, not generally confronted, so that people hold several understandings of what it is to be a Brahmin (cf. Ewing 1997:1 ff).

A second way in which this formal 'rite of passage' apparently fails in the end to transform a boy into a man springs from the rite's very specificity. The rite is directed towards specialist ritual knowledge and actions, and while the initiatory period includes much instruction on how to behave in one's wider life, it hardly deals with contemporary issues preoccupying men, such as how to find respectable employment or make enough money to build a brick house. This brings us towards an appreciation of the importance of arenas or fields and the understanding that masculinity or adulthood cannot be a seamless status effective in all social situations and at all moments. Identity work itself is not continual: demonstrations of masculine status are operative in particular and limited realms (see e.g. Coleman 1990). The boy who carries the goddess around the temple as ritual adult over an evening and is deferred to by other villagers, may then the next morning find himself back in school at the mercy of his teachers who call him a foolish boy, or be backed into a corner at a wedding and cruelly teased about his sexual inexperience by older women.

A third way in which the essentialism stressed while focusing on ritual practice and in a 'rite of passage' approach is undermined comes from an appreciation of what we can call performative aspects of the self.

Vishnu Nambuthiri during an interview about life-cycle rituals told us, 'I am a Brahmin because I do my duties and follow custom,' and 'a child acquires Brahminhood only through discipline and learning'. Sankaran Nambuthiri, who supplemented his schoolteacher's salary with *puja* work even at low-caste temples, sadly avowed, 'A real Brahmin will never act as *pujari* (priest), not even if he is desperate for money'.

We begin to understand that we need to think of gender in several distinct ways. We must follow local discourse in acknowledging a status-based aspect: a man is one who has undergone male initiation, or a man is one who works at a masculine trade or skill. But a man is also one who belongs to the category of men, a group of people continually set apart (in discourse, in ritual, in spatial segregation, in task allocation, in clothing, in speech forms and so on) from women. And this categorical division is essentialized and naturalized, just as we find over and over in studies of post-19th-century gender, through attachment to a naturalized and essentialized idea of biological 'sex' as a dimorphic pair and of sexual reproduction as the

necessary foundation of gender (see e.g. Laqueur 1987; Jordanova 1989; Rhode 1997; Fausto-Sterling 1997).

Yet we also perceive here hints of another way of thinking about gender: as performance, as something that must be done, and must be 'kept up' if status is not to be imperfect, stigmatized or denied. Sankaran Nambuthiri makes reference to the notion of 'A real Brahmin…', while Brahminhood can be claimed, 'because I do my duties', says Vishnu Nambuthiri.

Performance has recently come to nuance our understandings of gender. In some misreadings of the work of Judith Butler, it brings us back dangerously close to the idea of a 'role' which is 'played'. It brings us back to older role theories, which are explicitly concerned with the link between social role and individual performances, and assume the existence of a 'real'—perhaps ungendered—self underneath, a human who exists beneath the masculine roles of father, priest, headmaster. What Butler actually claims is that gender is performative (1999:139ff). What does this mean? Not that it is theatrical or a manipulated performance, although she has often been misunderstood in this way. In sociology, we have an older theory of performance, associated with Erving Goffman's influential book, *The presentation of self in everyday life* (1969); this text talks of the world as stage, and analyses our social behaviour in terms of the off-stage and the on-stage, self-conscious performances of social roles in different social settings. This is the idea that we wear masks and roles, and inherent in it are two things which make it very different from Butler's performativity: firstly, there is a degree of wilful manipulation and conscious shaping of the self in Goffman's idea of self-presentation; secondly, Goffman has a clear idea of an active agent, a self, and of a real self behind the mask, a real person who appears backstage, perhaps relaxing at home with family. Butler's performativity is utterly different from this, in that the performance of gender is compulsory and unconscious, not willed by the self, not totally open to change, not, 'who shall I be today?'. It does not imply an instrumental and layered self who lets certain people 'backstage', but rather a self that is actually produced in the process of making performative gestures. For there is, for Butler, as for many other contemporary theorists of gender, no real self to speak of behind the performance.

But in its stress on reiterative-ness and on the compulsory nature of the performance, rather than on creativity or innovation, does Butler's theory also bring us back towards the older idea of a standardized role or stereotyped set of behaviours? How to account for innovation, variety, deviance? We will continue to explore and address this problem and discuss how to account for change and protest, but for now we can take on board

the idea of the necessity for repeated or continuing performance. This necessity is, we have seen, actually recognized by our respondents, even as they make all sorts of wide statements about 'men' and 'women'.

Perhaps these issues will become clearer if we think them through with some more ethnography. Let us now turn to think about the vast majority of south Asian young men who do not undergo any formal initiation or rite of passage and consider how they might effect transformations from 'boyhood' to 'manhood'. Here, we can consider more deeply whether the ideas of roles and status have any virtue to them and whether the concept of performance takes us in a more helpful direction.

Non-Brahmin Men: Paid Labour and 'Rite-less Passages to Manhood'

Doing a man's work

Young men from manual and agricultural labouring families are of necessity drawn early into the adult world of paid labour and worries about food, shelter and money, taking on family responsibilities well before they leave their teens.[5] While such young men may occasionally be drawn from middle-status communities—*savarna* (within the caste fold) Nayars, established Christians (generally Syrians)—more commonly they come from lower-middle status communities or *avarna* (below the old untouchability line, outside the caste fold) Izhavas, more recently converted Christians, including many Marthomite Protestants; but overwhelmingly they come from families belonging to Dalit or Scheduled Castes (SCs) such as Pulayas and Parayans (ex-untouchables). While caste and class may never fit together in any predictable way, manual and especially agricultural labour is overwhelmingly tied to untouchable status, both in the form of statistical reality as the most common occupation among Dalit castes and as two conceptual categories, which overlap and evoke each other in people's imaginations[6] (Osella and Osella 2000a:70ff). A central part of 'manhood' within lower-status sections of Kerala society is defined around the demands of subsistence: a man is one who does man's work, and provides (cf. Willis 1979, 1979; Donaldson 1993; Dunk 1991; Willott 1997). As the Brahmin boy is admitted to the adult male world by virtue of his ability to perform *puja*, the labouring boy is admitted by virtue of his ability to provide cash and paddy.

Although lower-status communities place as great a value upon education as their high-status neighbours, with all children from all communities

staying on at school to attempt Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) exam at the age of 16, the material conditions of life for casual labouring families place great restraints upon its young people's capacity for study. Better-off students have electricity, tables, chairs, some quiet space in a proper house to study, good food, extra tuition, no demanding family responsibilities and few worries: none of these advantages are available to students in labouring families, and failure and drop-out rates are correspondingly high, with very few making it to the degree level. The small government grants that are given to the disadvantaged Scheduled Castes cover fees and basic textbooks only: the smart clothes, good food, extra tuition, supplementary textbooks, study tours and practically unlimited chances for examination re-takes, which most other students take for granted are often dispensable luxuries for Dalit students. Moreover, the peak work season of harvest time comes in March, during the school and college term. Because labourers can expect to get only around 90 days' work in a year, and harvest represents a unique opportunity to get paddy, students will skip college to help their parents work for food.

A typical 17-year-old boy in his pre-degree year may expect to do all the following, in addition to trying to keep up with his studies: around 40 days of paid labour; help to rebuild the family house (a thatched hut); liaise with outside agencies (e.g. *panchayat*, village office, health officials) on behalf of his less sophisticated and less educated parents; work unpaid in ferrying people and goods around the flooded area during monsoon; take part in the trade union and political party meetings which lead to the annual wage-rate negotiations with the landlords. Even a 14-year-old will labour for 25–30 days (at paddy harvest time) and, for those poorest families housed in temporary thatched homes, will also work on the annual hut rebuilding. For boys in the poorest labouring families, adolescence hardly exists: they move from an impoverished and deprived childhood in which their parents are unable to protect them from the knowledge of adult realities into a young manhood, which immediately demands that they take their share of responsibility by dealing with those realities. In many cases, their father is chronically ill, or absent, and they then become the man of the house. Taking on responsibilities at home, bringing in cash and paddy, building a new thatched house—all this enables a boy to enter the men's world.

Separation from the 'world of women' and a masculine identity could be seen to be automatically and easily achieved by virtue of the strict sexual division of labour, in comparison with similarly strict gender-based division of labour among other labouring groups (e.g. Busby 2000 on Kerala fisherfolk; Jackson 2000; Kumar 1992 on artisans of Benares; Jeffery and

Jeffery 1996 on agriculturalists; White 1992). Within *koolippani* (casual wage labour) only men do road work (tarmacking, digging etc.), tote head-loads, crew lorries and punt ferries. Within *krishippani* (agricultural labour, especially in the paddy fields) only men plough, sow, spray, fertilize and transport, while women's work is transplanting seedlings and weeding. The gender dimension of the agricultural division of labour is reinforced by its ritual aspect, which implicitly represents the land as a female goddess, who is ploughed, sown and fertilized (impregnated) by the men, while women nurture (grow, gestate) the seedlings (cf. Delaney 1992). Yet again, we recognize that although gender is here categorical and clearly places men and boys by virtue of their involvement in certain tasks and not others, still this is just another arena, and a masculine and/or adult status apparently consolidated in one arena—work—requires reiterated performance to maintain its effectiveness. It is, as we have seen among Brahmin boys who may be ritual adult men in the temple, but small kids to be teased at a wedding, another case of a masculine 'role', which does not in itself actually guarantee masculinity: it is partial, needing augmentation by and simultaneously inflected by the status accorded in other arenas.

Among labouring families marriage, another rite moving a *payyan* (boy) towards adulthood, also tends to come earlier. Young men settle down by their early 20s, either with a local girl or with one met at harvest time, when women from neighbouring villages come in to work. A man can expect to be a father, thereby boosting his claims to adult masculinity, already staked out through working and earning, by the age of 25. At this age, young men from higher-status communities and better-off families are still waiting to marry and are often still in full-time education. Compulsory active heterosexuality, in the form of compulsory marriage and fatherhood (Brittan 1989) plays a significant part in south Asian masculinities, but it becomes available at different ages, and always much after adolescence.

Relationships between senior and junior men in labouring households are nuanced through the brutalities of harsh physical labour and early death. A man of 50 whose productive life is on the wane, weakened as he is by years of gruelling manual labour, illness, poor diet and bad housing, will happily allow his son of 19 to have respect and a high degree of authority within the household; a high-caste boy may wait many years before reaching this stage of his life and may even, in families with large property holdings and 'big' family names, have to await his father's death before becoming acknowledged as a senior man. We will go on in the next chapter to think more about how contemporary men work not towards the status of some timeless Hindu 'householder', but towards a modern ideal rooted in the

historically recent and contingent figure of the modern bourgeois paterfamilias. In Chapter 4, we will discuss the importance for adult men of the construction or improvement of a ‘family house’. For now, we can take it for granted that providing a home and regular earnings for household subsistence are important activities defining all adult men.

College culture: Extended adolescence and liminality or a rite-less passage to manhood?

Both for prestige reasons and because of Kerala’s extremely high rates of unemployment, parents of all communities place great hopes on education. Almost all high-status and middle-status boys sit (and often re-sit many times) the exams for degree entrance. Even many manual labouring families will find the necessary cash to enrol their sons at a pre-degree college, and will patiently budget year after year for books, smart clothes and bus travel (Jeffrey 1993:55ff; 150ff). Young men from poorer labouring families combine study and leisure with occasional paid casual labour as soon as they can work, (aged 10–14); young men from the Asari/Viswakarma (craftsmen) communities start learning the family trade and helping out in the workshops virtually from toddler-hood and may abandon study in their late teens (after SSLC but before degree) for the family trade; initiated Brahmin youths help their fathers in ritual work.[7] In contrast to all these full-or part-time workers, teenager boys from lower- and middle-status families that have neither a hereditary family occupation/business nor suffer from crushing poverty are put under no pressure to contribute to household expenses or take up any job. Such things are deferred until either their education is successfully completed or until their family gets tired of paying for chances to re-sit examinations and change courses, and resign themselves to the fact that their son will either become a manual worker locally or try to migrate.

Riju, an Izhava whose father is a clerk at a milk cooperative, is 24, and his story is sadly not at all untypical. He passed his SSLC (matriculation) only at the third attempt, scraping through with minimal marks (215/600). He then took the BA degree entrance exams twice before getting admission, in the *management quota*, to study BA Economics at a local private college. His family paid Rs 10,000 in ‘donation’ (capitation fee) to the management committee; this was considerably cheaper than the going rate of Rs 25,000 for ‘outsiders’ because Riju’s father is a locally influential Izhava caste association official. He deferred his second-year degree examinations, knowing that otherwise he would fail, and sat the year again. When he failed

to get entry to the third year, his father and mother's brother decided to pay a Rs 15,000 'donation' in order to secure him a place at a Technical Training College (TTC) in town for a two-year electrical engineering course. When we spoke with him, Riju was not confident of his chances of passing the TTC first-year exams, and was hoping to defer them and re-sit the year. He admitted that he had never applied himself to his studies, regularly cutting classes, and spending the money his father gave him for books and extra tuition on shirt-pieces and entertainments in town, but felt that he was unable to do anything about his academic failures: 'Girls, and a few of the boys, don't do anything else except study; but it's all so boring ... I don't have the mind for it (*manasilla*); it's not in my nature.'

Boys' general lesser commitment to study is reflected in examination results and in the recent wholesale waiving of the former marriage requirement that a groom be better qualified than his bride. Many young men, clearly studying, like Riju, only under family pressure, argued that in high-unemployment Kerala, even a degree would not help them to get a job, and that their only hope of finding employment was for a *chance* to come up to go out of the state. A spell of migration has become a widespread aspiration and practice, and has begun to be incorporated into the non-Brahmin male life-cycle as a first step away from dependent boyhood and towards the manly status of wage earner (Osella and Osella 2000b). Even those who were more confident of eventually finding some form of job realized that along with it would come adult life, which means sacrificing individual freedoms as new norms of behaviour become appropriate and family responsibilities are taken up. In the face of all this it is not surprising that so many boys take a very short-term view on their lives, preferring not to think about the uncertain or difficult future, but treating their student years as a period of leisure and pleasure.

These college-going boys and young men spend large amounts of time out of the house in all-male socialising gangs (Osella and Osella 1998). Unmarried young men in their 20s who have finished or abandoned college, and who are unemployed or working, also participate in gang culture. The older *payyanmar* (boys) are more discreet and their adventures more daring than those of the youngsters. For example, younger gangs may hide out in an overgrown part of the village, passing a prohibited bottle of beer around: older gangs, especially those with money and transport, are more likely to go to towns where they are not known, to get drunk in 'Western-style' bars. The hard-core of one typical 'gang' in Valiyagramam consisted of a low-caste tailor of 23, a Christian tea-shop worker of 20, a low-caste TTC (technical college) mechanical engineering student of 19, a low-caste

economics degree student of 20. Another consisted of a high-caste factory worker (in Kerala, 'factory work' is a prestigious middle-class job, requiring a degree) of 28, a very-high-caste medical representative of 30, a mid-high-caste trader (his father owned an oil-pressing business) of 29, and a Christian rice-mill owner's son of 28. These groups of friends who hang around in the streets and lanes together, go to the *cinema*, watch the girls go by at temple or church, and plan their working futures, span a lengthy period from adolescence to marriage. Again, Kerala is hardly unique in this. An emerging literature on young boys' friendship gangs and street cultures reveals many of the features we find in Kerala (e.g. Chopra 2004: 48; Rogers 2005; Nisbett 2005; Leichty 2002).

Returning to this chapter's earlier themes—rites of passage and ideas about gender as expressed through role and status—we can approach the gang/group ethnography in two ways. We could take a lead from the work of Victor Turner and see this as a liminal period in which adult responsibilities are not yet assumed—a space that gives the license and freedom to break society's expectations. And indeed we have sometimes analysed these groups in this sort of way, for example, in describing the perceived threat such groups pose to older men and their investment in ideas about hierarchy, and the potentialities which such groups offer to those searching an alternative social vision to the one of caste/endogamy/hierarchy (Osella and Osella 1998). But we could take another tack and see the groups as integral parts of local society, as social spaces which are—to be sure—separated from the mainstream, but which are neatly articulated with particular aspects of it and serve eventually to help reproduce it, following Turner's fellow Manchester school ethnographer, Gluckman, and his classic analysis of 'rituals of reversal' (Gluckman 1963). Martyn Rogers has recently argued that the friendship groups formed by young men in Tamil Nadu are highly structured and subject to wider society's conventional constraints of class and caste (2005). We will explore this issue further in Chapter 8, when we write about the gang space as a safe segregated and actually fairly structured and rule-bound space in which young men experiment with and move towards adopting for themselves the adult masculine characteristics which will serve them in future. The two aspects need not be contradictory: in the East and Southern Africa collection mentioned above, several authors explore ways in which 'rites of reversal', in which everyday behaviours are toppled, can work towards both challenge of structure and hierarchy and social reproduction of those same structures, thereby neutralising the debate (between e.g. Turner-eqsue and Gluckman-esque positions) which would insist upon a

single unambiguous reading of the rites (e.g. Power and Watts 1999).

Murphy, writing about Seville, analyses the importance for young men of emergence from the world of family and *casa* (home) and entry into the masculine life of the *calle* or *barrio*, the street, neighbourhood (Murphy 1983). He argues that participation in the 'exciting world of the streets' provokes alienation and separation of the son from his father, engendering a progressive deterioration in their relationship as the son seeks more liberty and adult autonomy which the father initially frustrates. In the *barrio*, adolescents indulge in displays of 'exaggerated masculinity' (ethnically coded as Andalusian, in contrast to Galician) and 'flaunt their masculine pride' (1983:386). In the absence of adults, the young men can 'only gauge their progress in establishing a reputation for manliness by comparing their own behaviour (and claims) with those of their peers' (1983: 388). Eventually, the father acknowledges that his son has left childhood behind and begins to relate to the son in a new way—as man to man. The life of the street, then, acts like a rite of passage in a rite-less society. These insights can be useful here. When no formal rite or adult-led passage is available, young men turn inwards to the peer group in competitive and often exaggerated performances of masculinity, which may be purely theatrical but are still liable to be misread by outsiders as literal (Alexander 2000). The content of such displays of hypermasculinity can not be assumed or predicted. While we are familiar in the UK with seeing young men ostentatiously spit, swear, belch and mock fight when in groups on the street, in Kerala the street presence is decidedly different. While certain occasions of licence—festivals, last day of college—may lead to more exuberant outbursts, in general the singular and specific way in which Malayali young men on the street turn outwards towards the public is in the practice of *jackie*, or sexual harassment of young women, which we will discuss in Chapter 6. If no young women are around at a bus-stop to be catcalled or even pinched, then a group of young men appear to behave little differently from the sober adults waiting patiently nearby. In fact, a great deal of *payyan*s' masculine competitiveness appears to take place only among peers and out of the public arena, in the form of 'big talk' between boys, necessarily secret because it involves (generally false) boasts of sexual experience and other forbidden behaviour such as drinking or smoking cigarettes. This brings us back to Bob Connell's point that the audience for performances of masculinity is actually other men—those with whom one is in competition (1987).

But all this also means that if the apparently rite-less do actually have rites towards adulthood and manhood, then perhaps a focus on the presence or absence of rites or on the formal content of rites themselves is not very

interesting. Perhaps rites of passage are hyperbolized by those, like Brahmins, who take part in them, but are actually neither terribly effective nor necessary in making gender. We have already seen that even in the community with the most formalized and strongly marked rites, anxiety slips through about exactly how and to what degree those rites do make a Brahmin man different from a Brahmin woman[8]. And the common reflection from the initiated that performance—acting like a Brahmin man—is still necessary to differentiate the Brahmin from the Dalit, undermines the rites' claims to essentialize and activate particular versions of masculinity. Among groups where work and marriage rather than initiation rites are the first important markers along the road to adult manhood, the passage is even more markedly one of process and the staking of piecemeal claims towards adult masculine status rather than abrupt transformation and achievement. Anxiety and the possibility of not living up to one's claims of being a proper householder or family head can beset any man at any time. While discourse differentiates sex and often uses these terms to refer more broadly to gender (male and female—*aanu* and *pennu*) there does not actually seem to be a permanent and easily locatable social category of undifferentiated 'men', which one could enter to break away from the category 'women' (contra e.g. Chodorow 1978:106ff, 174ff; Gilmore 1990: 26ff, 229ff; Pleck 1987:29ff). There are many varieties of men, all living their gender through and in tandem with other characteristics such as caste and age. Some men are considered 'real men' while others are failures, or unmanly. Men evaluate themselves in a hierarchy of masculine performances in a competition that continues across many arenas and throughout their lives. 'Manhood' is not then usefully thought of as a status; it is never really achieved; it is not a role to be taken on or a one-off transformation to be effected. Where does this leave us? We can assume that all young men are trying to move towards something which will mark them off definitively from the little boys playing in the lane and from the young women sitting in the 'women only' space on the college bus, and which will put them into social spaces where they can act as men and be recognized or treated by others as men. The bodily changes of adolescence and conventional clothing styles are part of it: respondents repeatedly made associations between masculinity and the *meesha*, the moustache[9]. They also pointed out to us that boys used to go from shorts to *mundu* (traditional menswear) around age of 13 and now go into long pants around age of 15. But all of this is still clearly not enough to make a 'man': the trouser-wearing, moustached, working youth of 22 will still be called and referred to as 'boy' (*payyan, cherukkan*). From this perspective, perhaps the apparent

differences between communities—those that have rites versus those who do not, those that stress the importance of working and providing versus those that stress marriage and fatherhood—are less important than the commonality of a striving towards something that will be recognized by others and the self as a satisfactory masculine performance, moving around in the world with a presence that is taken as masculine. We turn now to the vexed question of what characteristics are to be deemed important in this idealized version of what a man should be and do.

Brahmin and Non-Brahmin Men: Dominant and Other Masculinities?

The Brahminical version of masculinity appears to hold something in common with high-status masculinities sometimes analysed as hegemonic in other ethnographic literatures (see e.g. Roper 1994; Pandian 1995; Almeida 1996): it demonstrates strong orientations towards control and is premised upon (to be sure, illusory) notions of individualism and self-sufficiency, detachment from the mundane (Fuller 1979; Madan 1987:39-40; Tambiah 1982; Das 1977:135–6). The goal of every adult male Brahmin is not the reproduction and rise in status of his community nor even the material well-being of his own family, but his own personal attainment of *moksha* or *mukti*, and this is to be effected through extreme ascetic measures, such as early rising, frequent baths and prayers and—most importantly—loosening of attachment. Among Brahmin males, who consider themselves to be in the fortunate and unique position of having at last reached the top of the tree of spiritual evolution, climbed branch by branch and painfully over many life times of reincarnation, this goal of final release from re-birth is thought to be achievable only by escape from the bonds of worldly attachment; it, therefore, retains a renunciatory cast. In this discourse, renunciation is an emotional, not a physical, reality, and is therefore available even to the householder enmeshed in worldly responsibilities (Madan 1987:39-40). In daily meditation upon the *ishtadevata* (personal god), Brahmin men practice loosening these emotional bonds, which they will in old age be able to cast aside entirely. As Shambhu Nambuthiri explained,

> ‘In daily mediation I must forget my wife, my family, my job, everything that is dear to me, and learn to consider them all as nothing, as merely aspects of Mother’s play (*ammayude maya*, the Goddess’ illusion). Then I can concentrate only on *Devi* (Goddess). At the same time I repeat *Om*, which is actually three syllables: A-U-M. It means

birth, death and pause. This is the cycle: birth, death and pause; then another birth, another death, a pause and start all over again. By doing this I learn how to break that cycle.'

Themozhiyar, described by Trawick (see e.g. 1990:73) is a 'renunciatory householder': he tries to minimize the bonds of attachment, lessen his own dependence, and develop his individuality and self-sufficient androgyny (e.g. 1990: 36; 74) as essential parts of his spiritual journey. We found this goal of renunciation-within-the-household among all Brahmin men we spoke to in Kerala, and also among many older Nayar men. It contrasts with the attitude of the Kashmiri Pandits (Brahmins) described by Madan (see e.g. 1982 and 1987:17ff) but is similar to the idea put forward by Das (1977:33ff). In Valiyagramam, the basic factor is degree of attachment: women, children and lower castes are most attached, Brahmins and men less so. Detachment, in this discourse, is associated not merely to spiritual maturity, but to maturity in its more general sense and to masculinity. Detachment is a pervasive positive high-status value in no way limited to the 'renouncer', but Brahmin men are self-reputed masters of it.

Hegemonic Masculinity?

Detachment appears as a value which marks out superior men from inferior men, women and children. It involves self-control and emotional distance, and is either an ascetic eschewing of worldly pleasure or the esotericist's plunge into the sensual world framed by ironic assertion that it is all meaningless—*maya* in the Hindu idiom, a self-serving dominance reproduction in Urban's provocative comparison of French Freemasonry and south Indian *tantra*. We can follow Urban's comparative lead to think about this orientation to the world in the broader comparative light of the analytic term 'hegemonic masculinity', both in terms of the ways in which it works to differentiate men and mark out some as superior, and in terms of the actual aesthetic tenor of the style—individualistic, detached and controlled.

Hegemonic masculinity is a term proposed by Bob Connell (1987) and explored by several critical masculinity theorists (e.g. Brittan 1989; Mosse 1996). Connell, one of the leading critical masculinity theorists, works with the notion of body-reflexive practice. He uses this as a base from which to argue that—beyond cultural differences—men everywhere are defined and define themselves in opposition to 'women' in a two-gender system in which what is 'masculine' is what is not 'feminine'. Men then form into hierarchies

around masculine characteristics, with a socially dominant form, the super-masculine, becoming 'hegemonic'. To remind us, 'hegemony' was picked up to satisfy the need of social scientists for a weaker way of thinking about domination than 'ideology'; as a term which did not assume complete brainwashing and absolute control by the dominating group, hegemony allows for resistance, opposition, gaps and unevenness in the projects of the dominant, and it also encourages us to look at the process by which the dominated fall into agreement with the dominant—not by violence or force but by persuasion. Hegemony is the means by which a dominated group in society is persuaded to ignore, minimize and even willingly collude in its own oppression. Hegemonic masculinity is an idea, a style, a set of practices of dominance, which coalesce around an idealized type of masculinity as the desirable goal. Those few who manage to achieve the goal will become the dominant men—the hegemonic males—and others will emulate them; the values embodied and espoused by hegemonic males (e.g. autonomy, rationality) will become values by which others will measure themselves—and fail. Arthur Brittan has discussed the keystone role of 'hierarchic heterosexuality' in forming hegemonic masculinity—we will come specifically to this question in Chapters 5 and 6, when we will be thinking about heterosexual relations (Brittan 1989:18).

Hegemonic masculinity then is what all men aim for but not all achieve. Hegemonic masculinity is tied in with successful strategies for the subordination of women and with dominance over women and other (non-hegemonic) males, such as 'effeminate' men and boys. The significance of this is that performances of a male gendered self are not primarily enacted, repeated and reiterated before a critical audience of women, but rather oriented toward 'audiences' of significant men. The relations among men in all-male contexts are of critical importance to establish masculinity (Herzfeld 1985; Almeida 1996). Hegemonic masculinity helps us appreciate the degree to which men 'do' masculinity for, against, in competition with each other, and the degree to which women may be irrelevant in the formation of masculinities. Brahminical masculinity—socially high status associated with control, detachment, power; and ideologically utterly separated from and unavailable to the feminine—appears at first blush as a candidate for hegemonic masculinity status.

In non-Brahmin styles, we find the opposite of detachment—entanglement in the world—at the centre of what it means to be a good man: work and providing for the family stand strongly as positive characteristics of adult men. However, because a labourer's work is casual manual labour and his family not a property and prestige group, the

endeavours of the labouring man are derided by the higher communities and by those lucky enough to have an *udyogam/joli* (salaried employment) rather than just *pani* (labour). Unlike the Brahmin teenager, who is accorded mature male status by all, the lower-status teenager is recognized as a man only within his own group. Higher-status communities are often even reluctant to grant full mature male status to any labouring man; labourers, with their hard-drinking habits and short-term orientations towards spending and saving, are generally caricatured as feckless eternal adolescents or perpetual dependent children. This shows the widespread power of the Brahmanic renunciatory ideal, in which dependency is devalued while self-control and detachment are equated with maturity.

This brings us back to asking whether the Brahmanic style refers to a hegemonic style. And here we find quite clearly that there exists a counter-discourse to Brahmanic masculinity, which is not simply a compensatory counter-discourse of the weak, but is actually the dominant Malayali style of being and is set right against such Brahminical values as vegetarianism/asceticism and religiosity[10]. For in Kerala (in notable contrast to neighbouring Tamil Nadu) non-vegetarianism is a taken-for-granted norm and vegetarianism a widely despised affectation. Malayalis hold fast to a local biology in which people of different communities have different types of body and different nutritional requirements, a view that sits comfortably with ethnosociological ideas about the differentiated person (Osella and Osella 2003). People protest that they would become weak if they were to eat a meal without fish or meat, and certain food items, such as lentil *dal* or yoghurt, are seen as the province of vegetarian and as not tasty or nourishing for most people. If people are away from home, the majority would not dream of entering a 'Brahmin' vegetarian meals hotel with its bland lentil and yoghurt-based meals, but would insist upon a Christian or Muslim establishment serving fish, meat and spicy *sambar* curry (cf. Michelutti forthcoming; Staples forthcoming[11]). Along with this, willingness to 'take a drink' and to be 'social-minded'—embracing kin and friends and being ready to help and get involved—are strongly positively valued. Here then, we have a set of values that are pitted strongly against Brahminical ones, almost apparently explicitly and antagonistically so. So does this mean that we have two versions of hegemonic masculinity? One appealing mostly to the hegemonic ideals of control and detachment and the other appealing to equally hegemonic ideals of non-vegetarianism, sociability and providing for the family? Could they be existing in schismogenetic tension, each drawing form from the other and edging the other to sharper definition, in the sort of psycho-social dynamic explored by Bateson and his followers

(Bateson 1958; Strathern 1988)?

At this point it seems clear that it would be absurd to proliferate hegemonies. After all, the whole point of the original attempt to delineate characteristics of something like hegemonic masculinity was to highlight ways in which society might posit one dominant model or style, which then set a gold-standard scale of masculinity against which all others are measured. The term 'hegemony' suggests agreement, singularity, homogeneity, and not plurality. So if we must jettison the search for a hegemonic masculinity, at least in South Asia, can we talk instead of dominant models or prestigious styles, and say that we have found one Brahmin and one non-Brahmin? We will turn now towards the next chapter, where we will shift away from generalities and present some detailed life history ethnography of successful men. We will be thinking more closely about mature men at work and in the family context. This will help us explore issues around the expression and enjoyment of dominance–and will in fact lead us to uncover considerable ambivalence. The next chapter will also give us material with which to continue to think about questions of performativity and success, and about the compulsory nature of gender performance. In this chapter, we will also be moving to consider recent history, delineating some of the specific structures which have worked to form contemporary ideals of masculinity and which then shape masculine subjectivities.

Notes

1. The most famous among those who explored this tri-partite ritual structure is British anthropologist Victor Turner. He paid especial attention to collecting and analysing ethnography of the in-between stage, seeing in liminality the possibility of anti-structure or a social creativity which was able to ignore the strictures of everyday life (Turner 1969).
2. For a discussion changes in education and employment orientations amongst Kerala Brahmins see Gallo 2004.
3. There are no Vaishyas and hardly any Kshatriyas in Kerala in general. When Malayalis talk of 'twice-born', they generally mean Brahmins.
4. Although the Travancore Devaswam Board has opened up *pujari* (temple priest) training, and employment in state temples to non-Brahmin (males), so far few have taken up the opportunity. Brahmins also retain a near monopoly on the upper end of the market in house *puja*s, exorcisms, astrology and so on.
5. We again reiterate that here we are talking about a rural situation and about non-Muslim communities; our forthcoming monograph discusses in depth the situation among urban Muslims, which is quite different, and revolves around trade, family businesses, the bazaar and male segregated spaces.
6. Distribution is crudely illustrated by the brute fact of percentages of each major

community working as unskilled manual labourers: 23.3 per cent of Izhavas; 50.5 per cent of Pulayas; 0 per cent of Brahmins; 7 per cent of Nayars; and 7.1 per cent of Christians.

7. Muslim boys in the towns often help out in a family shop or wholesale business.
8. Even in societies with highly formalized rites, further proof of manliness and purging of the feminine may occur, as in Israel where, as Kaplan (2000) discusses, adolescent *bar mitzvah* in no way guarantees manhood but is supplemented by army service.
9. In south India, the moustache is widely cultivated among men of most communities. 'Gender fusionist' Del LaGrace Volcano writes, 'I have a great deal of empirical evidence that the major signifier of "manliness" is facial hair'. (Volcano and Windh 2005:138). Across South Asia, beauty parlours offer women, as Rachel Dwyer notes for Mumbai/Bombay, 'a whole range of depilatory activities unknown in the West' (Dwyer 2000: 88).
10. See Rogers 2005 for discussion of non-Brahmin masculine styles in Tamil Nadu.
11. Staples, J. 'Go on, just try some!' Meat and Meaning-Making among South Indian Christians' and Michelutti, '"We are Kshatriya but we behave like Vaishya": food caste culture and modern politics among a community of Yadavs in North India.' Both forthcoming in special issue of Journal of Asian Studies., (April 2007) (eds) Caroline and Filippo Osella.

CHAPTER 3

Working Men's Lives

Introduction

We move on to discuss the role of work in the production and assertion of Malayali male subjectivities. To suggest that colonial and post-colonial modernity—and concomitant processes of capitalist development and state-formation—not only impact the lives of men and women in different ways but also entail a substantial redefinition of gender relations is perhaps to argue the obvious. Over the past 20 years these issues have been explored extensively in the historiography and sociology of south Asia, but, as we have seen in the Introduction, debates and discussions have been somewhat lopsided, focusing primarily on women and more specifically on the (re)production of subordination and inequalities within historical configurations of patriarchy. Research on work from the perspective of gender has followed a similar path. We know a great deal about how women's working lives—in the fields, households or factories—are shaped by and in turn transform specific gender ideologies in that they are inflected by historically contingent hierarchies of class and caste/community (see e.g. Fernandes 1997; Sen 1999; Kapadia 1999). Yet in their relationship to work, men have been generally treated, as Cecile Jackson argues, as 'universal ungendered subjects, rather than as gendered beings in which male identities shape relations with other men and women' (2000: 7; cf. Heuzé 1992; Parry, Breman and Kapadia 2000).

In this chapter, we will write against these over-generalising tendencies by presenting the histories of two men who, by all reckoning, have conducted remarkably successful lives at the opposite ends of the 20th century, embodying as they do aspirations for transformation and progress that have underpinned Kerala's projects of 'development' since the late 19th century. At first sight, the life histories of K V Krishnan and Satyan are straightforward

narratives of success: on the strength of their wits, single-minded dedication and resourcefulness, these men managed to transcend initial disadvantages—caste discrimination, poverty and lack of education—to reap the material benefits offered by the colonial economy and global capitalism, respectively.

But if the stories link these men to both caste-specific and state-wide narratives of development and progress, simultaneously they reveal slippages, discontinuities and ambiguities in Malayali lived experiences of modernity, raising doubts about whether such a struggle against hardships and setbacks has been at all worth it. Importantly, the stories—as stories about successful adult men—are embedded in specific gendered perspectives. Firstly, they are tales of both heroism and sacrifice, common tropes deployed in a host of different contexts to express a specific masculine aesthetic, for example, in recollections of the Sabarimala pilgrimage which we will discuss in Chapter 7. Secondly, we take note of the ways in which women become visible in men's stories, appearing fleetingly as peripheral characters—wives and mothers who support male life projects by managing the household. This and the specific positions taken by women in the stories makes very clear the articulation of specifically modern gendered subjectivities. These are represented by the figure of the 'male householder-provider' and the 'housewife', tropes and locations upon which individual and collective projects of development and mobility directly depend. By pluralizing these projects we want, on the one hand, to underscore the intersection of community or class-specific orientations and interests in the production of a state-wide narrative of 'development'—making it all but fragmented and contradictory—and, on the other, to argue the impossibility of positing a unitary 'experience' of male subjectivity—and, for that, of modernity—uninflected by historically contingent social hierarchies. Veering away from implausible generalizations, we then turn to specific life histories.

Both K V Krishnan and Satyan are Izhavas, a community which over the last century experienced some degree of social mobility, partly taking impetus from their caste reform movement and from sporadic militant action. Their struggle has taken place concomitantly with the flowering of modern institutions in Kerala and a self-conscious wider regional commitment towards 'modern' consciousness and away from a past commonly characterized by Malayalis as 'feudal' (see Arunima 2003; Devika 2002a, 2002b). It is through stories about such processes taking place during the late 19th and 20th centuries that we can understand ways in which modernity at large and modern (gendered) subjectivities in particular have

been figured and experienced.

Meanwhile, narrative theory suggests that life-stories are not only constructed post-facto but are actively used in the present to orient action (Carrithers 1995; Ricoeur 1988; Mattingly 1998). This chimes true with our findings that lives are lived and the stories that are told are always oriented towards bigger and long-term stories. The 'big stories', braided in with the stories provided by informants, are narratives of modernity as seen from some Kerala viewpoints. While satisfaction might be deferred, being 'modern' and 'making progress' remain powerful in popular imagination as desired (happy) story-endings.

Some Pre-reform and Colonial Stories

Sources published towards the end of the 19th century describe Travancore Izhavas as a community closely associated with tending coconut gardens, production and commerce of palm-derived products, and production and sale of country liquor (e.g. Mateer 1883:85; Aiya 1906:401; Menon 1929). From 1834, Izhavas involved in the liquor business—a sector of the economy they dominated—profited from the introduction of new *abkari* (liquor trade) regulations. While the 1881 Travancore census showed around 25 per cent of all surveyed men engaged in the extraction, production and sale of toddy, Izhavas are introduced by Thurston and Rangachari (1909:392ff) as 'toddy-drawing castes'. A section of Padmanabha Menon's 1929 history (1993:423ff) designates Izhavas' 'traditional occupation' as toddy-tapping, and is illustrated by two photographs: one of 'Izhavas with toddy-drawing pots' and one of Narayana Guru, 'under whose guidance … the community is making rapid strides' (1993:443). This dramatic counter-position of photographic images evokes the community's adoption and public projection under its reform movement, the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), of a modernist myth of linear progress from toddy-tapper to reformed Narayana Guru supporter. Whether they actually abandoned tapping or not, the percentage of Izhava men recorded in censuses as following their 'traditional occupation' of toddy-drawing decreased from 20 per cent in 1911 to 8 per cent in 1921 and just 4 per cent in 1931 (Kumar 1994:90; Lemercinier 1994:201). By 1944, the anthropologist A. Aiyappan, himself an Izhava, strenuously denied that toddy-tapping had ever been the caste's 'traditional occupation' (Aiyappan 1944:106-107).

Until the turn of the 20th century, most Izhavas worked as agricultural labourers or concentrated on the extremely low-status 'traditional' caste

occupation. Politically and economically weak, stigmatized under newly essentialising identity configurations as ‘toddy tappers’ and ‘devil dancers’, and considered unapproachable by clean caste Hindus, Izhavas as a group were associated with other manual-labouring untouchable castes such as Pulayas.

One famous story, reproduced in many printed sources and recounted to us in the field many times and by many informants, and always by SNDP officials in their attempt to explain to us the enormity of (both past and continuing) caste stereotyping and discrimination, concerns SNDP founder Dr. Palpu. He and his brother were English-educated by missionaries at home in the 1870s, government schools being banned in Travancore’s Hindu princely state to even wealthy Izhavas. In 1884, Palpu came second in the all Travancore medical entrance test; as an Izhava, his application to medical college was rejected and his—substantial—fee not refunded. He passed finals from Madras Medical College in 1889, and joined Mysore Government Service in 1891. Visiting Travancore as a qualified medical doctor, he went to the palace and pleaded to be permitted to return to his home state and to serve the Rajah. The Rajah’s response was (in some versions) to offer Palpu a patch of land with coconut trees on it, and the promise that he could tap toddy from them tax-free. In other versions, the haughty Rajah first tells Dr. Palpu, ‘Yes, you can serve me. Here there’s plenty of work for you to do,’ before having him taken outside, shown the coconut trees in the royal compound, and told, ‘There’s plenty of trees here for you to climb’[1].

Many economic opportunities emerged with the colonial economy. Izhavas turned their backs on the 19th century agrarian order to become agents of modernity in new forms of employment. Following increased demand on world markets, coastal Izhavas became small-scale producers and traders of coconut products (Isaac and Tharakan 1986:6-7). Under the labour-hungry plantation economy, others Izhavas found work as coolies or *kanganys*. Those with (English) education, while still barred from Government Service, could aspire to more prestigious and better paid white-collar jobs; establishment of the Public Works Department provided new opportunities beyond village labour relations. Some Izhavas, investing wealth accumulated over this period, began to emerge as large land-owners.

Alummoottil family is exemplary of this rising bourgeoisie which built substantial fortunes post 1870 from new opportunities. Kuttakkakaran Sekharan Channar was a major liquor contractor in Travancore, remembered even today for being ‘wealthier than the Rajavu’ and ‘minting money’. A prominent taxpayer who was close to the Dewan, Channar

enjoyed the Rajah's protection and was reputedly visited by him. The family lived in an old-style wooden house (*nalukettu*) before building the area's first European-style two-storeyed building. Channar acquired extensive paddy and coconut gardens. His successors abandoned the liquor business to concentrate on the higher-status occupation of agriculture. Channar is said to have had 12 elephants with Nayar mahouts. Although extremely rich, pollution rules prevalent until the late 1930s required Channar, on approaching temples, to dismount and walk the back alleys, while his Nayar mahout rode past on elephant-back. Commenting on this well-known episode, an Izhava villager remarked upon the anomaly that, 'His servant could do what he couldn't'. Stories such as this, highlighting the anomalous position of the caste's elite and middle-class, are common. They point out with pride the ability of some families to outshine *savarna* Hindus in wealth, even to hire them as servants, while remembering with shame and anger the injustice of caste rules placing myriad restrictions upon *avarna*s.

As such, these stories assert the community's right to respect while highlighting the absurdities of caste, an orientation which at once differentiates Izhava reformism from wider Malayali calls for modernization—focussed primarily on the reform of 'traditional' marriage and inheritance practices—advanced by *savarna* reform movements of the time (cf. Jeffrey 1976; Arunima 2003; Kodoth 2001, 2005). They also highlight the general atmosphere of agitation and appetite for change which was sweeping across India (see e.g. Oddie 1978; Hardiman 1987).

Talking About Reform

Several social reform and pressure group movements grew up among Kerala Izhavas throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the most successful being the SNDP. The organisation started a state-wide process of transformation and radical reform of the caste's social, religious and economic endeavours, accompanied by attempts to improve the economic fortunes of community members and a mass campaign to abolish untouchability and obtain political recognition, part of the general wave of reform/social protest movements sweeping India at that time. As existing stigmatized caste identity—toddy-tappers and agricultural labourers—was repudiated and mobility sought, a new group identity centred around generalized ideals of 'progress' and 'mobility' was formed and new imperatives set: education, respectable employment, thrift and accumulation of wealth, abolition of untouchability. As a result of processes in which Izhavas' degraded identity was erased—consigned to an unreformed past—all that remained was a

modernist orientation towards the future (Osella and Osella 2000a). The conscious choice, as a group, to turn the back to their 19th century selves left an 'identity gap'[2]. This gap they chose to fill with a self-created identity built in large part upon a sense of themselves as 'modern', standing near to Kerala's unambiguously 'progressive' Christian communities and against high-caste (*savarna*) Hindus (Brahmins, Nayars), whose own particular forms of modern self-consciousness was in the shape of cultivating essentialized identities rooted in a precarious tension between 'modernity' and 'tradition' (Kidambi n.d.; Haynes n.d.; Bhaumik n.d.; Joshi 2001; Liechty 2002).

Whether as a traditional occupation from which the community seeks to distance itself or as a modern source of capital accumulation redeeming the community from its stigmatized past, work stands at the centre of the Izhavas' imagination of a new collective identity.

Life Stories

We now turn from wider Izhava narratives to engage with the life histories of two successful community members. The story of K V Krishnan (1883–1953), illiterate labour-broker turned factory and mill proprietor, is narrated by a descendant; meanwhile, Satyan (1947-), part of Kerala's skilled 'labour elite', a mechanical engineer who was in Bombay during the 1970s, narrates his own experiences of going to the Persian Gulf to manage a European-owned workshop before returning to Kerala to launch what is claimed as Kerala's first 'modern style diesel workshop'[3].

The two protagonists have been unambiguously successful. Both have manifestly lived up to community ideals of self-improvement, wealth accumulation and rationalism: exemplary lives within the grander Izhava community narrative of progress and modernity. That the stories were narrated to us, a European couple, is relevant: they might be expected to weigh heavily in terms of presenting Europeans in a favourable light, capitalist production as benign wealth-improver for all and colonialism as a blip in history. We might also expect to see modernity (as promulgated by European missionaries, colonial administrators and entrepreneurs) characterized as a unilinear, self-improving trajectory away from 19th century 'backwardness'—signified by illiteracy, poverty, untouchability and so on. Yet within the overall optimistic and conventional narratives, clear signs of ambivalence are discernible.

The great-nephew of K V Krishnan spoke sitting on the spacious veranda of the huge *nalukettu* (19th century teak house) built by KVK. This is an exemplary narrative of the progress made by some Izhavas during

colonialism, when new possibilities of work and mobility unavailable to untouchables, within existing local agrarian relations, were opened up by the rush to the hills of the plantation economy. While KVK's nephew is at pains to emphasize success, wealth and status, we can unravel more complex threads.

'From a very modest background, [KVK] left here to work in a plantation as *kangany* (labour broker), where he was taught by one of his labourers to read and write.' This, then, was a man with few options at home: untouchable caste status; poor family; illiterate. KVK began as a low-level intermediary to European planters: organising comforts and pleasures for them, finding them labourers, communicating their will to workers. While the position of *kangany* is presented here as respectable employment and a progressive step away from the village, Daniel's work on plantation stories reminds us that the *kangany* could be a hated and degraded figure, standing isolated between workers and owners (e.g. 1996:130-1; cf. De Neve 2000). KVK's descendant told us, 'Although he spoke no English, he could always guess what the Europeans wanted, and so he gained their esteem and trust'. The *kangany* can be seen as the boss' lackey who ruthlessly schemes and lies in order to recruit and then implements the boss' exploitative demands without compassion, the traitor whose personal advancement depends upon—in the Malayali idiom—*soaping* the boss. KVK followed advice from his bosses and saved to buy his own plantation land which was then cheap and available. As his wealth grew, he started several innovative enterprises: mills, shops, a private bus and even a cashew-processing factory.

When he died, aged 70, he was buried, 'in his own estate, on the first plot of land he ever bought'. Great-nephew, taking great pains to tell the story well and reflect his ancestor in good light, assured us that before death KVK partitioned his property, providing for all his dependents. Pre-mortem partitioning, gradually introduced from the late 19th century onwards, is linked to the transformation of matriliny and the modern (but at the time shocking and much contested) practice of including sons as heirs. 'Some received 10 acres of plantation land and now they are rich'. KVK's then appears as a blessed life: dramatic reversals of status and fortune made possible by modernity—a phenomenon associated with colonialism and contact with Europeans which KVK whole-heartedly embraced and exemplified.

Satyan's story is set at the other end of the 20th century, when untouchability's worst excesses are but a memory and when 40 years of progressive state government have improved benchmarks of well-being. The before-after contrast is hence less startling, but Satyan's achievements are no

less impressive. When father—a petty shopkeeper—died, leaving the family destitute, Satyan's mother became a day labourer while Satyan underwrote study through agricultural labour. After passing matriculation, he went to Mumbai in 1963, as apprentice-engineer for a motor company. Nine years later he was recruited by an English firm to Muscat, Oman. 'At that time Muscat was only sand; I was the first Izhava from Valiyagramam to go to the Gulf. My German manager put me in charge of the diesel-maintenance workshop… he said I could use any extra profits I could make to buy new equipment … we became the best service station in west Asia … when I came back (to Kerala) I started a diesel workshop … I calculated things very well … and I know the trade very well: I learnt it from the British and Germans.'

In both success stories, we recognize outlines of the rational working and economic practices conventionally attributed to the modern outlook. Both men worked hard, saved, invested and planned their next move all the way through, overcoming miserable destinies through sheer will. KVK ignored sentimental and prestige associations of village land to buy property which in 'traditional' thinking is valueless, belonging to the 'wild' mountainous regions beyond village society. He is consciously contrasted—as rational modern man—to the backward-looking Brahmins who fail to develop instrumental rationality regarding land use and fail to perceive the value of land as commodity. 'In those days, Brahmins held all the land; it was all forest and they never went there... You couldn't buy, but if you offered them gold, they would give you 200 or 300 acres'. Satyan similarly self-consciously dismisses 'traditional' high-caste Hindu endeavour, characterized by rigid demarcations and scornful attitudes towards manual labour: 'If you treat workers well, they'll work sincerely. I work together with my employees; help them out, stay with them the whole time … other owners only work as managers, turn up to give orders and go back home'.

In both narratives, as we conventionally expect, being a modern man involves breaks: it is a violent experience in which the ruptures taking place are more than simple 'disembedding'. Both KVK and Satyan were induced or constrained to leave their native places to pursue dreams of progress, movements framed not as mere trials along the road to improvement but as near-intolerable degrees of loss and suffering. KVK lived all his life on the plantation where he worked, returning for brief visits to Valiyagramam. 'KV Krishnan built bungalows for himself and his family inside his own plantation but didn't live there until one and a half years before his death: before that, he was obliged to live in company quarters at Mundakkayam, where he continued to work.' We remember here the isolation of the

kangany, and the massive social costs of taking on such a role. After 10 years away in Mumbai followed by 20 in Muscat, Satyan was determined to return at any cost to his native Kerala. 'Although I was much liked and well paid, in 1990, I decided to return to Valiyagramam. I thought that I could take the risk … all my friends said I was a fool … I let them talk.'

Turning from physical to social rupture, KVK's story emphasizes breaks with the 19th century social order. Brahmins are presented not as lordly heroes but as innocent fools who sold valuable hilly lands for next to nothing, declining patriarchs who no longer have the means or will to act as leaders or patrons. In a topsy-turvy world, the story told is one of an untouchable distributing largesse and moving into a social space where he is known to the aristocracy. 'In 1923 there was great flood and famine here. The richest man in the area was the Brahmin from the big house next to the temple … people assembled to beg for help, but he felt threatened and didn't give anything. KV Krishnan, driving by, immediately sent his assistant into town to buy rice and provides which he distributed in front of the Brahmin's house while standing on his car: the Rajavu came to know of this.'

While Satyan had no experience of this 19th century rigid social order based upon unapproachability, he still, as an Izhava, is privately considered untouchable by many caste Hindus and could have expected, before leaving for Mumbai, to remain resident forever in the Izhava colony. Gulf monies have enabled him to overturn residential patterns where house location and type correlate closely to caste status. Satyan has built an impressive double storey villa in a large roadside plot where it easily outshines those of most higher-caste villagers, a fact acknowledged by the latter with resentment and a sense of shame and inappropriateness, yet impotence[4]. Like KVK, Satyan is all too rarely at home to enjoy the comforts he has bought and built: his workshop stands at the junction and he is usually to be found there.

In these narratives, modernity as experienced by men is about the over-determination of work. Satyan told us that in the Gulf, 'I worked very hard doing lots of overtime', while now, 'I work together with my employees; stay with them the whole time… everyday I am the first one in the workshop'. He mused that he had, paradoxically, spent more time with his family as an absent migrant: regular trips home meant hiring a taxi and taking wife and children on pleasure trips and holidays. Satyan would like to repeat these outings: his family was always asking him to take leave and arrange a holiday again; but now he was unable to shut down or leave the workshop. He thought at times that he might throw it all in, and was sincerely asking himself if the long hours and lack of free time were worth it. It is similarly

evident in KVK's story that life centred around the plantation: even as he visits home, constructs lavish new dwellings for wife and family, and opens up shops and factories elsewhere, the plantation is KVK's constant centre, the place he is tied to until just one and a half years before death. Even that last year of life was lived out in a bungalow built in his own plantation land: after leaving for the hills as a young man, he never returned to settle in his natal village or enjoy the magnificent *tharavadu* (ancestral house) which he constructed there.

Modernity, while offering possibilities of great material improvement, always also involves suffering and privation. The initial process of leaving one's place in search of progress is recounted as physical ordeal. Both narratives are typical in making much of the hostile physical environment to which the worker travels. The hilly regions where KVK 'got 500 acres of land' are dangerous and impenetrable jungle requiring forceful intervention and camping-out in an inhospitable environment before it becomes a tamed landscape where bungalows can be built and profits gained: 'Labourers felled trees and planted paddy for the first two years; only after that was the plantation started'. The Persian Gulf is even worse: 'Climate is the main problem there', such that, 'you can't bear it without air conditioning', a convenience out of reach for many labourers and in many migrant working situations—construction sites, workshops.

While modernity in classical narratives makes strong claims to universalism and equality, these stories compound physical suffering with social indignity and discrimination. Even as KVK ran from rural untouchability, he found himself at the wrong end of ethnic and class hierarchies at the plantations. The following quote is particularly poignant: it mirrors exactly the story (above) commonly recounted to illustrate the enormity of caste law, in which the wealthy 19th century Izhava was obliged to dismount his elephant when passing temple land:

'In the plantations only European owners had cars; they used to buy a new one every four or five years. K V Krishnan was allowed to buy one of these cars second hand, but unlike the Europeans he was not permitted to employ a driver, so had to learn to drive… but if a European car approached on the plantation roads, he had to get off the road, stand in the ditch by the car and let them go by.' Evoking restrictions on consumption also hint at continuity, recalling 19th century sumptuary law under which Izhavas were forbidden, for example, the use of gold, silk cloth or umbrellas.

In stories about the turn of the 20th century and its end, villagers continually draw parallels between caste hierarchies suffered within the village, and racial and class hierarchies suffered outside of it, comparing the

old agrarian economy, colonial plantations and Gulf 'labour camps'. Subjective experiences of hierarchy appear as analogous in many ways for those suffering discrimination, marked by shared tropes such as the vehicle whose use was forbidden by 'superior' in the 'elephant' and 'car' stories. The recognition of continuities by subjects of discrimination can be picked up and theorized by sociologists. This is not because 'caste' is equivalent or analogous to 'race' or 'class', but because processes of exclusion and capital accumulation, the forging of social hierarchies, work in similar ways, while class is lived through modalities such as race (Bourdieu 1990; Bradley 1996: Fernandes 1997).

Some—the European colonial planter, the high-caste landlord, the Arab workshop owner—are permitted under production hierarchies to express fully masculine values, such as freedom of movement, autonomy, lavish spending. For lower-caste and working-class men, their masculine effectiveness and claims to dominance are limited, sometimes circumscribed to particular arenas and sometimes simply truncated. Studies of how the dominant 'racial' category of 'whiteness' defines itself and claims dominance over various others, including the beastly, childish and hyper-sexual African and the effeminized Asian, make clear that 'race' and 'gender' constantly use each other as productive terrain for troping and claiming to concretize difference (e.g. Hoch 1979; Kondo 1990; Back 1994; Ransby and Matthews 1993; Mercer 1994; Dyer 1997). When we examine hierarchies of masculinities, ethnicity and class are strong operating factors.

Contemporary genderings of class and race have a precedent in South Asia. A rich literature on colonial masculinities in South Asia has revealed that the British in India presented themselves as hyper-masculine: rational, scientific, progressive, active, martial and even bloodthirsty. They then derided Indian, especially Hindu, men as effeminate—superstitious and irrational, lacking in self-control, weak and passive, unable to defend or govern themselves (e.g. Nandy 1980; Sinha 1995; McClintock 1995). A few groups—the 'martial races' or certain business communities close to British power—were certainly exempted from this blanket demasculinisation (e.g. Caplan 1995; Luhrmann 1996) while others were remasculinized (O'Hanlon n.d.) or altogether criminalized (Tolen 1991; Ansari 2005). A gendered way of viewing relative power became a large plank for British justifications—to self and other—for colonialism. Indians as a whole were, like women, in need of direction and governance, discipline and rule by middle- and upper-class British men, shaped as the latter were into superior persons by the twin highly masculine and masculinising institutions of public school and army (Lane 1995; Kanitkar 1994; Hansen 1996; Philips 1997; cf.

Srivastava 1998). Modernity appeared to offer stigmatized groups a means of recuperating masculinity, and here we see a double articulation between generalized India-wide processes of recuperating an imagined 'Hindu masculinity' (e.g. Nandy 1983; Joshi 2001: 162ff.; Banerjee 2005; Watt 2005: 143ff) and specific local projects among subaltern communities with doubly marginalized masculinities.

Unsurprisingly, we see an especially clear attachment to values of modernity among those who profited directly from the expansion of colonial capitalism. The relationship sometimes involves direct involvement with modernisation processes: English education; plantation employment; *abkari* business; opening factories; learning to drive; providing not only for nephews but also for wife and sons. It also takes the form of close connection with those who represent themselves as bearers of hyper-modern values and as superior performers in such masculine modern arenas as technology—Europeans. Alummootil built a European-style house, and has several instances of inter-marriages with Europeans; for KV Krishnan, *saippu*s (the whites) appear as dominators controlling plantation workers' lives but also proffering advice and gifts, while permitting styles of doing business, living life and asserting status alternative to those practised by local landed high-castes. Relationships may also, significantly, be with local Christians who are the first community to become modern entrepreneurs, seizing new employment and business opportunities (cf. Jeffrey 1976; 1993:96-117). Subaltern masculinity may offer men of the lower castes partial escape from identification with the wider position of 'effeminized Hindu' which is closely associated with high-caste landowners. Yet at the same time, lower-caste men struggle to assert a decent place in either the 'mainstream Hindu' or the alternative 'modern' masculine hierarchies.

While Satyan is circumspect with us while talking about the German and British bosses who taught him the trade, and would surely have some interesting stories to tell to a different audience, modernity still does not mean equality 50 years later in the Gulf; the close relationship with Europeans remains ambivalent. Recalling 19th century village residential segregation and sumptuary restrictions, we again note that modern production and social relations involve discrimination just as much as—and sometimes take on exactly the same forms as—their pre-modern counterparts: 'Where we live, there's no Europeans—they're in the cities in officer jobs—just Filipinos, Pakistanis, Bengalis. The Arabs don't mix with us at all; we mix with Pakistanis and with other Malayalis. Houses are all different too: office workers get air-conditioned concrete houses; ordinary workers have brick, wood or metal sheeting.' Again and again, workers are

reminded that their attempts to provide their families, build homes, accumulate goods are inferior when compared to the successes of those men who are 'superior' to them. Anxiety about one's capacity to provide is continual and deep-rooted: the modern man labours under a continual drive to earn, spend and provide.

While labour clearly plays a large part in modernity's wealth-creation, capital is also highlighted by both speakers. KVK's early investments included the 'traditional' form—land. But the uses to which land was put, as plantations rather than paddy fields—were novel; while land was surpassed by other investments: 'He built a weaving factory… In the 1920s he started the first local bus service… He bought a 750-acre cashew plantation and constructed a cashew factory, the first in that area.' The modernity of the narratives is closely related to technology, with fetishized and magical aspects. There is repeated mention of KVK's car, also 'first in the area'; his narrative ended on a note highlighting the importance in this story of the close embrace of modernity in its fetishized guise as technology/transport: 'He died… and was buried in his own estate… there is a memorial there where someone lights a lamp every day. His last car, a Chevrolet, is also preserved there and somebody looks after it.' The person in charge of taking care of KVK's spirit as beneficent ancestor also takes care of the ancestor's car: as a low-caste Hindu, KVK was not cremated but buried; his Chevrolet is 'also preserved', appearing as evocation or perhaps continuing objectification of that very modern spirit. KVK is an entrepreneur/pioneer, a man who is the first to clear jungle land, buy a car and start a factory. The story of 'progress' should have no ending, should draw its protagonists into a continual search for underdeveloped hinterlands where they can be always the first; the fetishized Chevrolet, preserved and displayed at the grave, represents attempts to transcend the eternal competition for first place and make enduring the ephemeral 'firstness'[5]. Daring, risk-taking and innovation are qualities of modern styles of masculinity, eagerly adopted by men from lower-status groups (as also by Christians) as potentially providing alternative forms of dominant masculinity to those such as the Brahminical which we encountered in the last chapter.

Although many go to the Gulf and return with some small savings, few, to the dismay and bewilderment of policy planners, invest in productive business (Osella and Osella 1999). Among those that do, the ones at the vanguard of 'rational modern' accumulation and investment, we find enthusiasm for technological projects: Valiyagramam's Gulf returnees are running photocopying, phone and fax bureaux; desktop publishing businesses; driving schools; video studios; internet cafes and dry cleaning

businesses. What saved Satyan from agricultural labour and the village was a technological skill, mechanical engineering which then acted as a passport to the modern centres of Mumbai and Muscat, while what distinguishes Satyan's workshop from other workshops throughout Kerala is the quality of its technology: 'I imported an engineer's testing bench from Germany'. He maintains that his imported tools and parts are higher quality than anything available within India: items are fetishistically imbued with the spirit of Germany, epitome of industrial modernity and efficiency[6].

The fascination with technology and the magical powers of modernity and capitalism to transform production processes is expressed in the myth of ornamental golden root crops in the homes of the 20th century 'new bourgeoisie'. Many villagers told us stories about the elite's fabulous houses, filled with precious artefacts. A recurring theme was that elite homes were decorated with solid gold life-size models of tapioca and yam plants, crops which provided Kerala's staple food in the pre-colonial economy, before paddy cultivation took off and rice replaced roots as the main and most prestigious source of food. When we interviewed families said to have such golden manufactured models of food-crops in their living rooms, we found none, but their rumoured existence suggests the links made in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by Kerala's 'big' families with new industries. Perhaps such stories also hint at suspicions about the artificiality of quick fortunes made through involvement in modern capitalism, while reminding us of modernity's unfathomable and at times sinister nature, converting humble root crop staples into inedible aggregations of wealth (cf. Taussig 1980).

Crops transformed into inedible wealth also reminds us of the more recent (post-1970s) accelerating decline of Kerala's paddy agriculture, as fields are turned into real estate, have their topsoil removed and sold, or are flooded and dug out to provide materials for the building trade. Another archetypal story similarly highlights capitalism's magical conversions—here grass (cow-fodder) into gold—linking them to human bodily suffering and modern single-mindedness. 'My next-door neighbour went in the 1930s to work in a Ceylon plantation and got loads of money: he was picking grass for a cow and found gold which he put in the grass basket before falling unconscious. His nephews came looking for him, found the basket, and took it straight home to hide: only after that did they bring their sick uncle home!' Perverted consumption and subversion or blocking of life-enhancing force is the charge here, akin to the charges of cannibalism levelled by Chewa Africans against Europeans (Kaspin 1999).

Modernity then is associated with progress and especially economic

betterment, closely tied to capitalist production and technological innovation, while what makes men suffer hardships and indignities is the promise of material gain. Modernity offers those who are not from traditional land-owning communities a chance to enter Kerala's dominant masculine performance arena as 'homeowners' and 'providers'; it also offers a chance to produce oneself as 'modern men', men who can claim dominance by virtue of their ability to understand and control technology. This is why material gain need not be associated with the individualism classically argued to be a necessary part of the entrepreneurial spirit. While individual efforts and 'drive' may be part of the initial impetus for success, modernity remains deeply embedded in community and family: chief beneficiaries of the wealth amassed by KVK and Satyan are their dependent families, the men themselves too busy working to ever enjoy or consume their own riches. Both men use wealth wisely in gift giving, cementing family and neighbourly ties; KVK leaves property in his will even to the driver and watchman. Wealth is also used in highly goal-directed consumption for future improvement of the household, as we will see in the next chapter (Osella and Osella 1999). The narratives offer a sense of KVK and of Satyan as workers and entrepreneurs, but what comes through equally is the importance of their identities as family men, householders and patrons. And while break and discontinuity are present, there is also a sense of continuity or coherent trajectory constructed out of references to spatial frameworks of 'the village', always present as ghostly backdrop even while absent; to social frameworks in terms of dependents; to temporal frameworks in the sense of a working life or a man's life cycle and to the persistence of discrimination (Osella and Osella 2000b).

Modernity, through its over-determination of work, opens up new arenas of masculine performance where once again men compete and are ranked according to their degree of success. Not all who try to improve their fortunes are able to do so; even those with a chance do not always profit from it. KVK's great-nephew impressed upon us the scale of his ancestor's achievements, highlighting the contrast between KVK's impoverished and illiterate beginnings and his spectacular end. He appears as a super-human figure effecting magical transformations: '(KVK) gave 10 acres of land plus Rs 100,000, the biggest-ever donation, (to SNDP college)'. And 'the wealth of people who received from him has increased ever since, while others have gone down'. In its very telling to us, this life story began to resemble a myth, beyond human proportions, the scale of the man's achievements imponderable and surely a sign of divine blessing, an interpretation bolstered by his great-nephew's careful selection of an auspicious place and

time (*muhurtam*) to tell us the story.

Satyan modestly refused in the final instance to take personal credit for his material successes: the opportunity to go from Mumbai to the Gulf, the moment when his workshop manager offered him a share in profits; he continually reminded us at key points that life's outcomes do not depend totally upon personal effort. Satyan's refrain, '*Pakuthi nammal, pakuthi daivam*', 'half our doing and half God's', is a take on a common Malayali proverb ('*Thaan paathi, daivam paathi*') which means the same. If success is always indicative of blessing, or more generally and ambivalently suggestive of mystical forces which have helped, failure stories (where luck is not on one's side) make it equally plain that hard work, thrift, rational application are not enough. While classical theory insisted upon disenchantment and rationality for modernity's subjects, ethnography maintains that modernity has strongly non-rational aspects: success in modernity's unfathomable game relies heavily upon luck and chance. Imponderables like luck or supernatural force are eventually the only things that satisfactorily account for fortune's uneven distribution and its highly a-rational falling upon deserving and undeserving alike (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). In this way, men are able to soften the blows of failure and even the relatively successful, like Satyan, are able to account for the fact that other men—the German overseer, the Arab owner—are equipped to make more potent displays of masculinity.

Winners and Losers

An early doctoral thesis submitted to the London School of Economics' Department of Social Anthropology was entitled *Culture Change in South-Western India*. This 1937 thesis, documenting and reflecting upon the 20th century's recent rapid social changes and their effects upon the untouchable Izhava community, was written by A Aiyappan, himself an Izhava and who later became a prominent social anthropologist. Aiyappan—educated, progressive, self-aware—and his work—reflexive, sociological—provide an appropriate example of Izhava modernity, while capturing prevailing moods. In his first monograph, noting progress in education, healthcare, employment and so on, and acknowledging a cultural interchange during late colonialism which he saw as partly fruitful, Aiyappan confidently foresaw the possibility of the abolition of caste, '…it is only a matter of time for the superstructures to crumble' (1944:194). Twenty years later in 1965, his next book, *Social Revolution in a Kerala Village,* Aiyappan methodically recorded and commented upon Izhavas' continuing progress since Indian Independence (1947), noting with satisfaction that while things were by no

means perfect, it could be assumed that beneficial change would continue with sustained modernisation. Aiyappan imagined that he could predict the direction in which the story he was recording was moving: his desired ending—equality, material comfort—was also the probable one.

Yet we see that even modernity's clear winners share ambivalence towards material success and the price at which it is bought. To throw these stories into sharper relief, consider the case of the unsuccessful: those who, in Malayalam idiom, lose out when 'life is a competition' and are consequently marginalized for failing to live up to community ideals of 'progress' and mobility and family provideing. Many Izhava villagers have taken the same steps as KVK and Satyan, only to return penniless and ill after a period of unsuccessful migration. Sometimes the labour broker cheats and fails to provide the promised job; sometimes living costs in the place of migration are so high that no significant savings can be made; sometimes conditions are simply too hard, and the discouraged migrant returns.

Keshavan lives in a sparsely furnished two-roomed brick house. Over 60-years-old, emaciated with hollow chest and a racking cough, the physical privations of life as a manual labourer have left him exhausted. Keshavan went to Ceylon in 1940 for plantation labour, but, like many, returned penniless and, having loosened ties with local landowners, was forced onto the open labour market. He worked as a ferryman, transporting commodities along the now bustling canals to market centres. Keshavan's 22-years old son Premadasan was confident and cheerful in 1993, when borrowing his Mumbai train fare, telling us that within one week he and his friends would find good work and make money. Back home two months later, thin and ill, Premadasan lamented, 'I got a job as a trainee air-conditioner mechanic. The contractor got Rs 1,000 a day but I got just Rs 25 for crawling through the pipes. Nobody was giving us any money… We paid Rs 4,000 deposit for a room, Rs 150 per month for rent plus Rs 50 per month for water. We got water from 5 till 7 in the morning and only had one bucket… There is work, but the wages are no good and the work is too hard. Employers are thieves! You need a lot of money to live there! You travel 140-km a day just to go to work; leave the house at 7 am and get back at 7 pm—how can you live like that?' We note here that of course many villagers are living exactly 'like that': packing toys 12 hours a day in miserable sheds outside Chennai city limits; migrating seasonally to Gujarat to work in prawn processing units; travelling five hours daily from one decrepit shared room in a crowded and expensive block to work at a tea-stall in central Mumbai. Many wives in Valiyagramam stay locally with children and elders because their husbands, working away, cannot support

families.

There is a great attempt to rationalize this situation—so common across Kerala—of absent working husband/fathers[7]. And here social and especially gender conservatism comes into play as a most useful value to be drawn upon in mitigating many men's failure to live up to the ideal of modern bourgeois householder. Women and children are generally held to be soft-minded and easily influenced. Hence, men who cannot support and re-locate the entire family but who work as 'bachelor migrants' sending home remittances commonly argue that women and children need to be kept back home in Kerala if they are not to change for the worse and 'lose' their culture. Among Hindu men working in the Gulf states, anxieties about the Muslim other and the Arab man entwine to produce discourses of the Gulf as a dangerous place, utterly unsuited for family life. Remittance migrants in Indian metropolises draw upon south Indian conservatism to insist that their families would be corrupted if exposed to (e.g.) Delhi fast food and western fashions, while the moral status of Malayali women—mostly Christian—migrating as nurses to the Gulf or the States is routinely questioned (see e.g. George 2005: 45ff). This gender-splitting move then allows a further ideological manoeuvre to be made. For if women and children are too weak to migrate, better off protected at home, then migration can come to be figured as a daring adventure and as masculine. Migration and modernity become twin masculine arenas, anxiety assuaged by the comforting presence of women and children safe at home and guarding 'traditional culture'.

Izhavas wholeheartedly embraced modernity in the hope of overcoming once and for all caste discriminations. Modern employment offered not only the chance to escape village-based hierarchies but also held the promise of a generalized economic progress deemed necessary for the overall transformation of the community, if not of society as a whole. It offered low-caste men from families which could not draw upon large landholdings or even tenancy rights, the chance to stake their claim as 'householders'. The Izhava reformer K. 'Sahodaran' Aiyappan (1889–1968) of the Brotherhood Movement analysed the problem facing his fellow-caste members as one common to—hence requiring unity of—all lower castes, campaigning for inter-dining with lower castes and for inter-caste marriages. All this initially won him out-casting and the nickname of 'Pulaya Aiyappan' which he declared a compliment. Aiyappan was an admirer of Russia: in 1919, he was encouraging Izhava coir workers to follow the Soviet's lead and to take militant action against *savarna* castes, eventually altering Sri Narayana Guru's famous maxim, 'One caste, one religion, one god' into the more radical slogan 'No caste, No religion, No god'. (Isaac and Tharakan

1986:10, 21 ff). The absence in contemporary Izhava public rhetoric of figures such as 'Sahodaran' Aiyappan testifies to the SNDP's eventual re-interpretation of Sri Narayana Guru's universalism as a selective egalitarianism which seeks for equality with *savarna* castes alone while excluding—if not actually marginalizing—lower-status communities (Osella and Osella 2000a: 190ff). At the same time, while community orientation towards modern employment has led to the marginalisation of those Izhavas who have not been able to abandon stigmatized practices, such as agricultural labour and toddy-tapping, entry into the regime of capitalist production, with production styles involving high rates of exploitation and worker mobility and ever-escalating demands on the consumer, has exacerbated internal differentiation on the basis of class. We will continue to discuss the escalating demands upon families since the early 20th century.

Conclusions: Modernity, Work and Masculinity

The life histories told to us can be considered on several levels. Most obviously, we have the modern work-histories as recounted. These form part of or weave into the teller's sense of his own life trajectory and family (his)tory. As Izhavas, the tellers also hold in mind a familiar confabulated group narrative of the caste's history since the late 19th century which includes familiar dramatic anchor points such as untouchability, poverty, plantation, Others (Nayars, Christians, Pulayas, Europeans), the reform movement, migration, labour and thrift, and the all-important goal of progress. Life histories told in the 1990s are often—as our two examples here—worked in to make a close fit with this post-1930s community master-narrative of optimism and progress, but sometimes another prototype is used, that of the wily Izhava trickster who steals Brahmin knowledge or Nayar gold, or successfully 'passes' as a member of a higher-status community. A growing sense of agency, entitlement and ease in the world appears to be partly responsible for intermediate-low caste men's abandonment of this prototype of betterment in favour of a less magical solution. Also responsible is the correspondence between the community narrative of the mobile lower castes (OBCs) and another powerful and pervasive master-narrative: the global story of modernity and development, promoted by the state government, reform movement and development theorists alike (cf. Franke 1993).

Rather than a straightforwardly positive progressive movement, ambivalence is threaded right through the stories: modernity brings freedoms—from poverty, from caste hierarchy and from agricultural

manual labour. It is also associated with constraint—bodily suffering in harsh environments and unfamiliar labour disciplines; submission to racialized discriminatory hierarchies; a compulsion to follow work, regardless of inclinations. Modernity brings mobility which can be a pleasure: KVK and Satyan enjoy car travel and the deference offered by stay-at-home villagers to those who have ventured further abroad; or a pain: as plantation labourer or Gulf migrant, the worker bids farewell to family and sets out on a journey from home in a frame of mind very different from that of tourist or pilgrim. Associated with physical movement is a sense of expanded physical horizons, involving possibilities of cosmopolitanism and taking on when returning home the sheen of the sophisticated man-in-the-world. Yet at the same time, plantation and Gulf workplaces appear as self-contained worlds, microcosms where people—mostly men—from many locations are held together yet stand apart, separated by class and ethnicity, and quite absorbed in the work at hand, in many ways oblivious to the wider world outside.

The narratives then offer complex and not entirely predictable pictures, often going against the grain of the more abstracted and optimistic community narratives and popular histories. We find rupture and rapid change but also continuities.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the narratives remain silent about women: these are stories of men who defy circumstances and struggle to achieve success, where movement in space leads to eventual social mobility. Women—as mothers and wives—remain in the background, overshadowed and marginalized by the heroic feats of their sons and husbands. And yet women are essential to KVK and Satyan's success. Satyan's mother takes on manual labour to save money to send him to school; KVK and Satyan's wives take on the care of children and the family home, entirely, and allow their husbands to concentrate on the task of accumulating capital. Withdrawn from paid employment—in particular from manual labour—KVK and Satyan's wives stand witnesses to their husbands' modern outlook and economic success. We can read here a re-gendering of Kerala's modernity via a work of purification. In the name of progress and development, at the intersection between individual, community and state-wide projects, familial roles are redefined through the ideals and practices of upper-caste and bourgeois domestic morality (cf. Uberoi 1994). While modernity, through the over-determination of work and employment, defines men like KVK and Satyan as primary breadwinners, it simultaneously transforms their wives—note here the difference between Satyan's mother and wife—into housewives. We notice, however, that in

practice this work of gender purification cannot be complete. Working class households—for whom there is no mobility ('*progress illa*')—continue to rely on women's manual work to make ends meet. These labouring women not only suffer stigma, not living up to contemporary ideals of housewifery; but they also, of course, undermine their husband's masculine status, for a man's status across south Asia is heavily dependent upon the respect granted to his womenfolk (e.g. Mandelbaum 1988; Ghadially 1988; Raheja and Gold 1994; Jeffery and Jeffery 1996; Mookherjee 2004).

J. Devika has argued that the winds of economic and political modernisation sweeping early 20th century Travancore society were brought by significant shifts in orientation towards capital accumulation, whereby paid employment—specifically government service—came to replace agrarian landlordism as the privileged site for wealth and status creation. This went alongside the emergence of novel family forms and subjectivities: the modern family, sustained by the husband as main bread winner and supported by the domestic management skills of the wife (2002b: 32ff). Careful household budgeting, accompanied by consumption appropriate to specific statuses but commensurate to available means, are indeed the hallmark of emerging urban middle-class practices elsewhere in India, part of a generalized discourse linking the successful reproduction of the bourgeois family to the welfare and development of the nation or state (Kidambi n.d.; Haynes n.d.; Bhaumik n.d: Devika 2002b; Joshi 2001: 69ff.; Banerjee 2004: 96ff.). In Kerala (the princely states of Travancore and Kochi, as well as British-administered Malabar) at the centre of this shift stood those who, having been marginalized by transformation of *tharavadu* (joint family)-based economy, had invested their share of landed assets in modern education for their children (primarily, but not exclusively, sons), who eventually went on to gain white-collar employment in the developing public sector (Menon 1994; Arunima 2003). But by the 1950s, modernist orientations towards familial forms centred around the householder-cum-provider and consequent marginalisation of women's contribution to household economy, extended to the working class. Devika writes that debates over minimum wages

> '…justified the nuclear family as supportive of disciplined and thrift-oriented life which made the husband a responsible provider. Proclaiming such a family in which the husband provided for the wife and children to be desirable, it legitimized the discrepancy between the wages of male and female workers, holding that women were not expected to maintain their husbands. On the other hand, in more and

> more sites, women who worked for wages were increasingly represented as primarily mothers engaged in paid work to enhance the family's income' (Devika 2002b: 44; see also Lindberg 2004; cf. Sen 1999; Fernandes 1997)[8].

We can see, then, that KVK and Satyan's life histories intersect with wider modernising processes redefining male (and female) subjectivities in the name of community as well as state progress and development. But just as their engagement with modernity appears to be shot through with slippages and ambiguities, we cannot but notice breaks in their relations to idealized dominant masculinities. At first sight, their commitment to capitalist forms of wealth accumulation, to the deployment of instrumental rationality to achieve the goal of social mobility and to the embracing of practices—regarding inheritance, post-marital residence, family budgeting and so on—that sustain the transformation of family life, makes them exemplary modern householders. But just as the 'Five-Year-Plan' filmic hero of the Nehruvian era discussed by Srivastava—the modern, rational, progressive man, normally represented as an engineer, doctor, scientist or bureaucrat—is clearly marked as both middle-class and upper-caste (2004b: 199ff), so the Kerala modern householder is equally located in the experience and aesthetic of specific (male) segments of society. Successful as KVK and Satyan might have been in their working lives, their subordinate positions within hierarchies of caste, class and race over-determines their life trajectories as men. The subaltern nature of these masculinities is exemplified by lack of or limited education precluding access to white-collar employment, by the hardships endured during migration and by their struggle to assert status back home. While this demonstrates how gender subjectivities are always experienced through and inflected by social position, it also indicates that the reach of hegemonic/dominant gender models ('breadwinner', 'householder') has to be tested against lived experiences. While men like KVK and Satyan are undoubtedly successful providers—albeit this success is marked by significant sacrifice and hardship—their position as modern patriarchs at the centre of the nuclear family is severely undermined by their absence, their lives being completely absorbed by work to accommodate the demands of modern employment and the imperative of (family and community) progress (cf. Cornwall 2002). Rather than being an ever-present 'patriarch', a decision-maker in the style of the pre-reform *karanavans*, migrant men must exercise agency at a distance and through the co-operation of others. Often, brothers or elderly male relatives back home are called in to perform the absent man's part; just as

often, women take on greater responsibilities (Gulati 1983, 1993; Kurien 2002). Contemporary 'Gulf wives' who do the banking, pay school fees, make decisions about home maintenance and generally manage household affairs in the absence of menfolk, can recuperate their feminine respectability and try to ensure their husband's status by configuring such household management activities as properly part of the 'domestic', the realm to which women are utterly welded. They also, of course, work hard to protect their public reputation by ensuring that they step outside the house only for things the wider society would deem justifiable; pleasure trips to the *cinema* or ice-cream parlour are out of the question until one's husband comes home on leave.

Living at opposite ends of the 20th century, the working lives of KVK and Satyan are embedded in different stages of global capitalism and state development. Employment desirable in the early part of the century has lost its shine; while nowadays a labourer in the Gulf might earn just as much as a primary school teacher, local (non-professional) white-collar salaries are insufficient to support increasing levels of family consumption. Consequently, one would be hard pushed to argue that the 'white-collar salaried man' continues to define Kerala modern masculinity (Devika 2002b). At the same time, migration, especially to the Gulf, has created a split in men's lives. As we will go on to explore in the next chapter, a period of working, devoted utterly to the accumulation of capital, is followed by an eventual return. Moving our attention to the whole male life–cycle, we see that careful accumulation of wealth through thrift and deferral of pleasures is followed by the adoption of community-specific status-enhancing activities centred on conspicuous consumption and its public display. The *mundu*-clad landowner, the planter or the trader/businessman—associated with the practices of Hindu, Christian and Muslim communities, respectively—remain powerful culturally appropriate referents for the transformation of economic capital into status and provide differentiated, idealized masculine styles for mature men. Although we are aware both of the historical and political contingency of such categories and of their internal fragmentation, we nevertheless identify a common orientation towards an ideal of male independence. The successful landowner, planter or trader/businessman does not depend on others for his livelihood and is simultaneously at the centre of a web of patronage, including a wide-range of dependents (Osella and Osella 1996; Mines 1994). In the following chapter, then, we move on to explore consumption, another arena of production and assertion of masculine subjectivities that might both reinforce and undercut the identities constructed around participation in work.

Notes

1. This compares with the experiences of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891–1956): 'Despite...an education which only a few...could attain then...caste-Hindus did not allow him to continue in office' (Radhakrishnan 20.1.91:col. 1).
2. We can argue that members of lower castes have an especial propensity towards embracing modernity, since the past, for them, represents not a glorious golden age but a miserable history (Osella and Osella 2000a).
3. We collected these two monologic narratives in single long sessions by pre-arrangement. The narrators had responded to invitations at the end of earlier meetings by saying that 'it would be interesting to hear much more about this'.
4. Sumptuary laws, which forbade for example, double-storeyed houses to untouchables, were abolished in the 1920s.
5. We are very grateful to Yasushi Uchiyamada for this insight.
6. Parry (1999b) reports that the quality of steel produced at the Bihlai steel plant is equal to that produced anywhere else: the common Indian insistence on the innate superiority of foreign goods has been perhaps treated too simplistically by outside researchers, willing to accept the flattering implications and to overlook the deeply fetishistic nature of such assertions (cf. Osella and Osella 1999).
7. Even as many policy planners and newspapers—the 'left-behind non-migrants'—pounce upon it as pathological and antithetical to family values (see discussions in Gulati 1993; Zachariah et al. 2003), we will argue against these stigmatising discourses in our work on Calicut Muslims (forthcoming).
8. See Kidambi (n.d.) showing that in 1920s Bombay, a Labour Office inquiry into the *Family Budgets of the Middle Class* went along with inquiries into the living conditions of the working class.

CHAPTER 4

Men of Substance: Earning and Spending

Introduction

We consider now some ways in which consumption contributes towards the constitution and expression of recognized masculine statuses and identities. We purposely shift our attention away from consumption as such towards wider orientations on the use of economic resources—cash in particular—which inform consumption practices. Continuing from the previous chapter, we will talk about Kerala migrants. Over the past 30 years, not only has Gulf migration transformed the state's economic and social landscape, but the Gulf migrant—the prototypically successful and above all wealthy man—has come to represent the aspirations of many Malayali *payyanmar* (boys). Attracting thousands of men with the prospect of rapid economic progress, migration has accelerated their movement along a culturally recognized idealized trajectory towards mature manhood, while accentuating characteristics already locally associated with essentialized categories of masculinity. Exploring masculine orientations towards consumption through the lens of migration, four important local essentialized categories emerge. First, the *gulfan*, a term that refers to the migrant during his periodic visits home and immediately upon return. A transitional and individualistic figure, defined largely through relationships to cash and consumption, he is typically a deracinated and not fully mature male needing to be brought back into local life. During the period of reintegration and movement towards maturity following return, the *gulfan* must tread a balance between two extremes. These are that of the *pavam*, the unsuccessful man who dissipates wealth by over-scrupulous observance of social obligations, and is thereby left without the means to support dependants and demonstrate personal masculine prestige; and his obverse, the *kallan,* the individualistic anti-social man who, by refusal to honour social

obligations, remains asocial and deracinated. A fourth category, which modifies the ideal of the householder-provider discussed in the previous chapter, and unmarked as a widespread cross-community ideal, is that of the successful, social, mature man: head of a household holding substantial personal wealth, supporting many dependants and helping many clients, having both financial means and social maturity.

These styles spread over time: *kallan*, *pavam* and successful patron-householder represent possible resolutions of the returning *gulfan*'s dilemma. The styles also cross-cut the male life cycle: first-time Gulf migrants are typically young and unmarried; at the end of an initial period of migration their return to Kerala-life goes along with marriage, maturity and movement towards adult status. *Kallan*, *pavam* and patron-householder represent possible trajectories in movements out of *payyan*hood (immature male status), not standing in equal relationship to 'manhood'. Engagement with manhood—full adult male status—requires continual demonstrations of competence in the performance arenas of both masculinity and maturity; achievement of dominant masculinity requires more than mere competence. Displays of substantial cash wealth emerge as important displays of gendered power and agency (masculinity), which need to be expressed within a framework of maturity, specifically *buddhi* (intelligence or powers of discrimination, wisdom).

Once again, male identities emerge as unstable and fragmented, as a continual negotiation between various positions, while individual men pick their way through competing demands and maintain precarious balances (see e.g. Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991; Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Cornwall 2002). At the same time, fragmented male gender identities are dialectically related to dominant, culturally approved essentialized notions of how successful mature men should behave: the hegemonic ideals which set specific contexts and arenas that men with ambition should engage in. Where fragmentation exists it is not the result of migration per se (see eg Bhabha 1994; Chambers 1994; Clifford 1997; Gilroy 1993; Hall 1997; Rosaldo 1989), but because (gendered) identities are in any case fragmented; at the same time identities are essentialized and defragmented in local projects of self-making (cf. Baumann 1996; Herzfeld 1985, 1997; Ewing 1997). By thinking in terms of trajectory, we can understand how articulations take place between separated arenas (the Gulf and Kerala; toddy shop and home) and how the illusion of at least partial coherence may be spun between fragmented parts of the self.

Ways of Consuming

Kerala Gulf migrants are frequently reprimanded by politicians, development agencies and, most importantly, the popular press; they stand accused of greediness and selfishness. It is routinely said that instead of investing in productive activities they engage in conspicuous consumption of expensive goods and services (see Osella and Osella 1999). Moreover, their taste for foreign-imported goods and styles is presented as corrupting the integrity of traditional cultural and moral values, making them agents of current processes of 'neo-colonialism' and cultural decay. While we see here a resonance with contemporary critiques of India's expanding middle classes (Gupta 2000; Fernandes 2000)—equally accused of putting individual pleasures above the imperatives of national development—we also find a continuity with wider debates over 'appropriate' levels of consumption taking place in Kerala and elsewhere in India at least since the first half of the 20th century (Joshi 2001: 69ff.; Kidambi n.d.; Haynes n.d.; Bhaumik n.d.; McGowan n.d.). At that time, however, the attack by social reform movements against the consumption practices of upper-caste landed elites—excessive and wasteful spending in life-cycle rituals to uphold status—went alongside the realization that the 'basic needs' of the modern household had expanded to the extent that sustenance of appropriate middle-class life-style 'justified women's effort at income generation' to boost family finances (Devika 2002b: 47). By the 1960s, the ideal middle-class family is indeed defined by high consumption, whereby electric consumer durables are 'no longer articles of ostentation, but necessities' (ibid.: 48). The apparent contradiction between condemnation of excessive spending of the landed elites and the growing consumption of the modern middle classes was mediated by the emergence of an orientation towards the rational management of family resources, which would accommodate demands for status-appropriate consumption to the continuous accumulation of wealth (Kidambi n.d.; McGowan n.d.). Unlike the pre-reform *karanavan* who squandered property and wealth to uphold family status, the ideal modern householder would carefully match resources to expenses, whereby increased consumption would be matched either by generating more income or by making savings elsewhere, for example, by reducing family size via family planning (Devika 2002a; 2002b; 2002c). We observe, then, that the relation between limited resources and ever-expanding consumption needs could not but generate a tension between not spending enough—hence, failing to support middle-class status—and spending too much—hence, failing to contribute to family and community or state progress—i.e the same tension which informs the local opposition between

the stereotypes of the *kallan* and the *pavam*. The *gulfan*, then, is criticized and lampooned in popular discourse not for his proclivity for conspicuous consumption per se, but for his lacking, as social parvenu, in the rational and discerning attributes—the *buddhi*—of the modern (upper-caste) bourgeois householder.

And yet, we find slippages in this public moralisation of consumption and, in turn, in the ideal of the householder. An orientation towards conspicuous consumption has historically defined and sustained middle-class status—even in pre-reform times when it was restricted and regulated by caste-exclusivist sumptuary laws (Osella and Osella 1999). Indeed, as Liechty (2002) argues, consumption is not an epiphenomenon of middle-class lifestyle, but central to the constitution of middle-class identities. Importantly, over the past 30 years, Gulf migration has significantly transformed the relation between statuses associated to the accumulation of wealth and to its use. Given that Gulf migrants cannot settle away but must, sooner or later, return home, the spatial and temporal separation between work and consumption make it possible to hold a labouring job in the Gulf, while simultaneously supporting a middle-class lifestyle back in Kerala. Hidden from social scrutiny, work no longer constrains the status ambitions of those who cannot but take on devalued manual or labouring jobs, ambitions which can then be objectified and publicly expressed through conspicuous consumption (importantly, before liberalization of the Indian economy, Gulf migrants had almost exclusive access to foreign-produced consumer goods). Migrants' access and relation to consumption—in many instances dramatically altering their status and generally offering the chance to forge new identities—together with past exclusion of large parts of the population from many significant areas of consumption regardless of economic status—has over-determined present practice. While consumption appears just as important as—if not more than—employment in the determination and expression of social statuses—exemplified by the enthusiastic subscription of consumer loans available post-1991 economic liberalisation—the ideal householder is being redefined in contemporary popular imagination as a successful provider *and* a successful consumer[1].

These transformations appear to support Srivastava's observation that Indian middle-classes' orientation towards thrift, deferral of pleasure and re-investment which defined the developmental project of the Nehruvian era has been superseded by an aesthetic of immediate gratification of desires through consumption (2004a; 2004b: 199ff; see also Haynes n.d.). And yet, as we see it, rational economizing of resources and conspicuous consumption continue to inform practice, albeit they might be deployed in

different contexts. Thus, we find a man who had always taken pride in his ability to save, carefully recording in a diary every expense and planning future investments in detail, moving to spend most of his hard earned savings to renovate the house and to buy must-have consumer goods in anticipation of his daughter's wedding. Apparently feeling that this unexpected change in attitude required justification, he told us, 'What could I do, I come from a good family. As an ex-government employee and *social worker*, I am respected by everyone around here; I also have a daughter to marry. Nowadays everyone has marble floors: I had to get one myself, otherwise people would think that I am either poor or stingy'. The issue, then, has never been whether to consume or not (cf. Van Wessel 2004), but how to consume.

The adoption of specific consumption practices enables people to objectify and to redefine both their Self-perceived and Other-perceived social position and also their desire for mobility. Located within individual, familial and group mobility strategies, consumption assumes a long-term dimension, oriented towards the present and the future. From this long-term perspective, consumption practices take on a normative aspect, changing in time to follow not only continuous redefinitions of goals and strategies but also the life cycle of (male) consumers, whereby an initial youthful orientation towards transience and ephemerality should eventually be replaced by a mature demeanour directed towards duration and permanency[2].

Operating within and articulating the realms of class and status, consumption stratifies consumers in several ways: firstly, by means of access to cash and the ability to spend; secondly, by means of distinction, involving both access to and knowledge of an increasingly wide range of goods and services; thirdly, by means of articulation with values that elevate and celebrate the figure of the male householder. The latter values, rooted within immanence and substantiality, simultaneously denigrate both the values of transience and ephemerality and those people associated with them, who then fail to engage with householder status and become characterized as immature and ineffectual. A clear local distinction exists between transient forms of consumption such as fashion, oriented towards the person and the body and especially associated with the young and the low-status, and the more widely valued long-term and fixed forms, such as land and housing, oriented towards values of permanency and the household group. Consumer durables, as relatively affordable portable property associated with marriage and domestic life, stand between these two extreme forms. Here different consumption styles do not suggest

permanent shifts in orientation (cf. Liechty 2002; Srivastava 2004a, 2004b). Rather, consumption is clearly articulated with the life cycle, as people's spending patterns are expected to change over time: young unmarried men spend cash freely on the ephemeral and personal pleasures of fashion and *cinema*; young, new or would-be householders buy domestic and luxury goods; mature households channel substantial wealth into future-oriented investment in housing and children.

Migrating to the Gulf not only spells an escape from underemployment or unemployment but is also a move away from *payyan*hood (young immature status) towards full adult status as a householder, a position partially claimed through marriage and fatherhood but also by showing ability as a competent 'provider/consumer' who uses money appropriately. The first step along this road is the accumulation and display of cash.

Men and Money

Historically, south India has been a major importer of silver for coinage, Malabar's famous spices being traded for the extra bullion required for a cash-hungry economy (e.g. Chaudhuri 1985:215–218; Washbrook 1988:59; Barendse 1998; Prakash 2004)[3]. Cash retains prominence in many arenas of Kerala life: at Hindu festivals, cash donations collected amongst devotees go at the front of the procession, held aloft for all to see; celebrations are marked by giving cash gifts; a popular necklace design is the *pavan mala*, a string of gold sovereigns; fake paper US $ 100 notes are available in local stationery shops. To the dismay of policy-makers and planners, there is no compulsion to convert cash or invest in productive activity. Among Gulf migrants, non-Muslim communities[4] most commonly invest money in itself: those with large amounts operate private loan companies, (locally known as *blades*; cf. Nayar 1989:348); money is invested in small amounts as life insurance policies, bonds or other forms of financial capital; the bulk of a family's cash assets are usually kept relatively liquid, in short-term fixed deposits in banks. It is for its unique liquidity and ease of movement that cash is so valuable, making a large bank balance not only a sign of wealth, but specifically a promise of cash richness (cf. Rao et al. 1992:72ff; Price 1996: 100ff).

People keep large amounts of cash in the house, and move them around in complex loans and transactions. When Rs 25,000 went missing from Usha's house one Sunday, a neighbour remarked that the thief could have been anybody, because 'everyone' knew that the key to the house safe was kept in the empty Quality Street tin on the glass wall-display unit. Usha's

husband, one of the richest men in Valiyagramam, was away running his haulage business in Oman. In his absence, the store of ready cash sitting in the living room was both metonymic of the man himself, a reminder of his existence, and a means by which his agency and influence stretched from the Gulf and back to the village and his own household. As we have discussed in Chapter 3, the power of the migrant is not established or asserted by the exercise of patriarchal authority over everyday family life, but through the control over the flow of cash to the household.

Cash is an important sign of success and masculinity: it is important to note that a man is someone with liquidity, not just assets. Holding land and owning property is important, but so too is command over cash. Lack of local employment opportunities and low-wage rates do not have simply economic implications, for wealth is a central and essential requirement in most styles of masculinity. In some styles, especially associated with younger men, the source of wealth, while not irrelevant, is of lesser importance than the amount. Money, which is 'New', Gulf-earned, gained through running a *blade*, achieved by hard labour and saving, or even via semi-legal means, is all good money (cf. Parry and Bloch 1989: 23ff). Illegal money, such as that which comes from smuggling or cheating on a property deal, is better than no money at all. Those very many young Hindus who are increasingly willing to make money under whatever constraints present a radical challenge to the 'official' insistence by family and community on the primacy of *manam* (dignity) and an earlier orientation towards the symbolic capital of 'salaried government job' (cf. Heuzé 1992: 23; Devika 2002b). Migration helps limit the damage to prestige by helping conceal one's occupation, and splitting the moment and site of wealth accumulation from its moment of consumption, instead enabling and encouraging greater focus on results, viz., cash earned[5].

Certain ambivalences stem from attitudes towards consumption and display that are embedded in different styles of masculinity. Brahmin men maintain, at least publicly, a disdain for the accumulation of material wealth, focusing instead on possession of ritual knowledge and education. Among older men from communities involved in long-term mobility strategies, such as 'small' Christians and Izhavas, a man is expected to enjoy his wealth within limits that do not deplete it. He should restrict his spending, save or invest, and continue to work as long as he is able-bodied. Younger men dream of massive wealth as a means of resolving tensions between conformity to the older generation's accumulative impulse and the dominant spending ethos. A common Christian criticism of Nayars, whose older generation largely try to live up to the dominant 'spending' aesthetic,

is that, 'they would sell all their properties and ruin themselves in order to celebrate Onam (harvest festival) with show'. Among high-caste Hindus, assets may be sold if necessary to obtain hard cash. It is common practice to sell land to raise dowry monies rather than giving the land itself as dowry. At the other end of the social spectrum, low-caste agricultural labourers display a transient attitude towards wealth. When money is available, for example after the paddy harvest, it should not be accumulated but enjoyed in an easy-come-easy-go fashion, treating male friends at the toddy-shop, and buying clothes and expensive food-items for wife and children (cf. Busby 2000: 53ff).

In the mainstream, across communities, for men with an eye for local status and power games, accumulation of wealth and its display and mobilisation in (often expensive) prestige-enhancing spending activities go hand in hand. Attitudes are not mutually exclusive, but are used contextually to forward or justify time-specific strategies and positions. Accumulation and spending set performance hierarchies of manliness, which result in and are linked to forms of feminisation of those who are perceived as not playing the game or, far worse, as losing the game. In contrast to ethnography of African pastoralists, who convert cash to cattle and count cattle as male wealth, here it is cash itself which is the fetishized item. Ferguson (1985:661) notes three functions of cattle in Lesotho: establishing a husband as household 'head' and providing tangible, visible support, even in his absence; acting as 'placeholder' for the migrant male, asserting symbolic presence in the face of absence; involving a man in relations of patronage and reciprocity which may enhance prestige. All three functions apply in the Kerala case to cash itself. Following Taussig's discussion of money, we note that cash, far from standing apart from symbolically and culturally loaded items like cattle as an abstract value, is actually particularly well suited to acting as a fetish and to effecting magical transformations (1997:129ff; cf. Carsten 1989).

Cash is a magical substance. While cash, like gold, is of general and wide importance, cash appears, like gold, to have a particular gendered angle: as gold is especially associated with women, cash appears especially linked with men. Wealthy men make large cash donations to temples, churches or mosques, the names and amounts recorded on notice-boards and in the printed festival calendar booklets distributed to houses in the catchment area[6]. When a group of men go drinking together, Rs 100 notes will be flashed and masculine prestige gained by paying for rounds; men with money in their hands will, and are expected to, subsidize an entire evening's drink and food. The commonest way of celebrating is to give a *treat* or *party*;

for women, distribution of sweets among women and children; for men, hosting an evening's drinking for male friends and relatives. The comparative cost of men's part in festivities is a function of masculine status—male sociality demands generous spending, even excess. It is not surprising to find that successful Gulf migrants, those who have access to and flaunt considerable amounts of cash, are commonly represented as hyper-masculine, an effect magnified by rumours of their feminine conquests and drinking sessions in the Gulf and often maintained to some extent by behaviour on return trips home.

Cash is then a signifier not only of wealth and prestige but also of masculine status, pieces of paper that reckon the worth of a man. This relation between men and money can be traced in several directions. A young man's value is calculated in monetary terms (how much dowry he can command) on the marriage market; a mature man's value is at least partly reckoned by his earning power, concretized in banknotes, which may be left raw or converted into other forms of objectified personhood. Money has no essential nature: life-cycle rites provide opportunities for self-enhancing public cash spending and gifting (Werbner 1990)[7]. At weddings, the bride's brother or cousin takes pride of place as he arrives with a black briefcase stuffed with wads of notes: the dowry. Since provide of dowry is officially a fraternal responsibility, the briefcase's contents speak directly of his status. Among Hindus, wedding gifts, presented during the ceremony to the couple as they sit under the *mandapam* (centre-stage), are strictly gendered—women give ('traditionally') cooking pots or (more lately) household items (ornaments, tea-sets) to the bride; men give cash gifts to the groom. Women's gifts link women, via other women, to the hearth and kitchen; men's cash gifts are not mere impersonal money, but represent something more masculine passed from male guests to the groom.

The Gulfan

We are arguing that migration is one means of bridging a gap—temporal and categorical—between *payyan*hood and manhood. The *gulfan* is a figure spanning this transitional period; he belongs to an intermediate category, not yet fully adult but with certain central characteristics of adult maleness, importantly the possession and management of money. A focus on cash as the central defining characteristic of failed or successful *gulfans*, and the focus on the consumer items brought and the expenditure mode while on visits at home, articulate with an idealized male life cycle. Given that most *gulfans* begin their period/s of migration as young bachelors, leaving the village as

immature youths (*payyanmar*), visits home are opportunities to demonstrate not only financial but also specifically age and gender-related progress. Consumer goods accumulated in the parental home will after marriage form part of the *gulfan*'s own household. Displays of substantial cash reassures onlookers that he is becoming a man of means, with resources to support a wife and children; marriage usually follows the second or third home visit.

Perfect exemplars of the *gulfan* aesthetic exist only on the cinema screen and in books—not surprisingly, in view of the impossible demands of inexhaustible wealth and never-ending spending sprees; as a hegemonic ideal it is extremely strong, being the dominant aspiration for most young men. The Gulf migrant has joined the cast of stock characters in popular cinema, novels, magazine stories, travelling theatre and (vernacular) television serials. He is something between a hero and a fool, sometimes glamorized, at other times ridiculed.

In popular films and plays, the returning *gulfan* is invariably portrayed as arriving by taxi from the airport, the car loaded with boxes and parcels. He wears a designer shirt, white trousers and the latest sports shoes. He smokes *foreign* cigarettes and wears branded sunglasses. On one wrist he has a gold bracelet, on the other a gold watch and around his neck a weighty gold chain[8]. When the boxes are opened, television sets, stereos, video-recorders, electrical kitchen gadgets, fridges and washing machines come out. His house is, inevitably, new and concrete-made; inside, video, TV and stereo are on full display. He drinks every night with his friends 'Johnnie Walker Red Label' brought from the Gulf; his stories, punctuated with English words, leave everyone agape. He is a man about town, frequently seen in the air-conditioned *bars* (where alcohol is served) of city hotels, treating his entourage to chilli chicken and whisky. He pays very large sums of dowry for the marriage of his sisters, and, when he marries, receives a large dowry as well. Here, the intriguing links between cash and masculinity, spending and potency, draw us towards the work of Bataille, notably his insights into the logics of excess—logics found in consumption, violence and eroticism alike, all of which we identify as performance arenas especially inflected by masculinity (see e.g. Bataille 1962; 1985:116ff; or discussion in Miller 1998:84ff). The *gulfan* is the very image of Bataille's visions of excess, as far removed from Calvinist capitalism as could be.

The case of Baby Chacko

In Valiyagramam, Baby Chacko is the man who perhaps most closely lives up to the '*gulfan*' stereotype. He started life poor; his father was a landless

ploughman, at the very bottom of the 'big' Christian Jacobite community. Baby and his father were huge and strong men and good agriculturalists, so landlords with 'no taste for farming' passed land on to them to cultivate. Their lucky break came when land reforms gave them the land they were working on, allowing them to take the profits from it. Not content to remain a cultivator, Baby left his father in charge of the fields and, by judicious buying and selling of paddy, built up enough capital to get to Bahrain, where he worked as a mechanic for seven years. He now owns 12 acres of paddy land, a lorry, a car, a motorbike, two *blades* and lives in a comfortable gulf-architect-designed two-storey house with garage and surrounding coconut garden, built on the main road near a large market centre. On our first visit, we could see through the open front door that Baby, his brother who had just fled from Kuwait (the Gulf war was on) and a friend were in the front room of the modern concrete house, playing cards for money, and drinking *good* (imported) whisky. Baby leapt up to shake hands with and smack Filippo on the back, jokingly calling him 'Filippachayan', using the suffix of affection and respect used towards mature Christian men. Baby wore a brightly coloured synthetic *lungi* (waist-cloth), obviously imported (Singapore or Gulf) or an Indian 'designer' label (e.g. Bombay Dyeing) with a T-shirt. His friend and brother wore ready-made trousers and 'Vivaldi' (designer label) shirts. Baby had a gold watch, a long and heavy gold chain around his neck, a gold identity bracelet and a massive gold full-sovereign ring, all items bought in Bahrain.

Baby Chacko is often described as a *goonda* (villain), this said by a few with a tone of contempt, but by the majority (who go on to describe his phenomenal rise to wealth) with grudging admiration or glee. Like many other *gulfanmar*, Baby Chacko is believed by many to have made his earnings abroad *on the black*, by smuggling gold and dollars; several people told us in perfect seriousness that he had a printing press with which he turned out counterfeit notes[9]. These allegations suggest disbelief that substantial fortunes, such as those accumulated by Gulf migrants, can be accumulated in a short while through hard, honest work. They do not, however, express a negative moral judgement about the migrant (cf. e.g. Taussig 1980; Parry and Bloch (eds.) 1989): on the contrary they reinforce the clout, glamour and status surrounding the figure of the successful *gulfan*. He shares the attributes of other heroic characters who, through outstanding individual qualities, such as wit, charisma, charm, initiative, trickery, courage and physical strength, manage to accumulate wealth without being tarnished by the indignity of labour (cf. similar continuities between 'trickster' figures and the socially mobile African, e.g. Bayart 1999:35ff). Nor do these allegations

express a distinction between the ‘inside’ moral economy of the village and the tarnished ‘outside’ world of capitalist wage-labour: former landlords, whose profits were made through appropriation and hoarding of village lands and grain are described, accused and grudgingly admired in exactly the same idioms (counterfeit, evil magic). Akin to the ‘underworld king’ popular in Hindi and Tamil films, the *gulfan* is portrayed as enjoying access to an inexhaustible source of ‘easy money’ that enables him to conduct a life of luxury, ease and unlimited spending. What is central to the *gulfan*, and what makes him the source of admiration and aspiration, is his hyper-masculinity, signified in his relationship to cash—mastery of large amounts of it[10].

By presenting wealth as ‘easy money’ and engaging in conspicuous displays of wealth and consumption, the *gulfan* strives to associate himself to a particularly powerful cultural prestige model, itself rooted in aesthetics of elite patronage. This is personified by the pre-land reform upper-caste landlord[11] who, sitting on an easy-chair in the veranda, made money from other people’s work (i.e. without his own labour) and spent large amounts of money holding sumptuous religious celebrations. The fact that in practice everybody knows that Gulf monies are neither limitless nor ‘easy money’, that most *gulfanmar* work extremely hard, live in a harsh and difficult environment and save to the last dirham, is, at this level, irrelevant. By colluding in the construction of an image of the successful *gulfan* as a patron, endowed with the power, prestige and independence ensuing from and demonstrated by owning and displaying ‘easy money’, villagers can justify their demands for help and assistance. At the same time, the images of surplus and prodigality associated with foreign migration are too compelling and attractive to let go (cf. Hansen 2003). This construction is helped not only by the fact that the Gulf is generally considered to be a place of unlimited riches, of ‘easy money’ waiting to be plucked but also because the Gulf—the place where wealth is to be accumulated—is far away from the village, the place where wealth is consumed and displayed.

The other half of this ambivalent figure, antithesis of the successful *gulfan* and an example of abject masculinity, is the failed *gulfan*, who is stereotyped in films, TV serials, stories and so on. While the primary defining characteristic of the successful *gulfan* is plentiful cash, this pathetic figure is characterized by the lack of cash—he is the migrant who does not have enough money to sustain the cycle of conspicuous consumption and display of wealth. According to local accounts of how to spot a failed *gulfan*, after a few days of his glorious arrival in the village by taxi from the airport, he starts using an auto-rickshaw and soon takes to the buses or an old, rusty

bicycle. From drinking whisky and smoking foreign cigarettes, flashed around in packets, he reverts to visiting the local toddy shop and buying single *bidis* (locally made cigarettes). Within a few weeks, the cash he brought back has all gone towards paying off debts and providing dowry and loans to relatives and friends; slowly all the gold he initially displayed with pride is mortgaged to a *blade*. The short-lived flashiness and cautious use of cash of such *gulfan*s show that what is being spent is not 'easy money' but on the contrary, hard earned and carefully garnered savings. The worst possible case is when this meagre cash is earned by ignominiously sweating it out as a despised *coolie* worker on a building site[12].

The *Gulfan* Predicament: *Kallan* or *Pavam*

Returning migrants are under pressure from competing demands: on the one hand they need to hold on to their personal wealth; on the other they are under pressure to spend it to fulfil their social obligations and to keep up status. The extreme outcomes of these opposing forces are expressed via two categories, both ambivalently valued: that of the *kallan*, a self-interested maximiser, cut off from and despised by local society, and the *pavam*, the innocent good-guy, generous to the point of self-destruction. Unlike Lesotho migrants, who are protected by the 'bovine mystique' from putting cattle wealth at the disposal of others, Kerala migrants' wealth, expressed as cash, stands firmly in the 'domain of contestation'—wealth to be fought over (Ferguson 1985: 657).

The prevalent—and mistaken—perception among villagers (encouraged by the tales and behaviour of returning migrants keen to enhance their reputations) of the Gulf as a source of unlimited wealth and the *gulfan* as beneficiary of quick and substantial profit, puts great economic pressures on the migrant. His refusal ever to admit limits to cash resources is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, he is under pressure to demonstrate alleged success through *jada* (flashy, flamboyant behaviour) and *chettu* (literally, at the cutting edge of style), and by spending lavishly. On the other, if he starts spending large amounts of money (typically to make major improvements to his house) regarded as going above immediate consumption needs, he will be under pressure not only to repay debts incurred to finance his migration but also to fulfil expensive obligations towards close kin and relatives, such as providing for dowry and lending large sums of money.

The *gulfan* faces a dilemma. If he wants to reap full benefit from his newly earned wealth and concentrate on building up reserves of cash and consumer goods for his own future household, he has no choice but to try as

much as possible to avoid social obligations (cf. Sagant 1996: 278ff) by claiming financial difficulties, arguing that he has not made enough money as yet, and trying to contain the pressures put on him by bringing back 'foreign items' to distribute among the circle of relatives, especially to those from whom he had initially borrowed money. He can, of course, use such excuses only within limits, otherwise people will begin to gossip and to regard his migration as a failure, bringing shame upon him and his family. If demands come from affines, default is less problematic, part of 'normal behaviour' in relation to them, but serious problems can occur when the close circle of direct kin is involved. In respect to them, the obligation to share one's fortunes is a moral one and a breach of it might give rise to disputes, which may be publicly aired, causing the *gulfan* loss of face and reputation, breakdown of relationships and, eventually, social isolation. Again, consumption is not enough: it must be balanced with the modern householder-provider role.

Gopalakutty's sons benefited from positive discrimination policies and obtained degrees in engineering. One migrated to the Gulf, while the other went first to Bombay and then to the U.S.A. Once the money started to pour in, their father back home began to distance himself from relatives and caste-fellows. In this way he tried to avoid both having to respond to demands for financial help and being too closely associated with his own (Scheduled Caste) low-status group. As his isolation from his community grew, Gopalakutty tried to establish a new social position for the family by forming new relationships with higher-caste villagers. To prove his worth, he spent a considerable amount on buying the ancestral house of a local high-status Nayar family forced to sell by partition. Gopalakutty's selfishness and transgression of social rules and expectations became subjects of disapproval and gossip among the community, including snubbed kin: behind his back he was called *kallan*. When Gopalakutty made a large public donation to a local temple during its annual festival, his fellow caste members and ex-neighbours spread the word that he was doing so because he needed and wanted to remove *dosham* (harm resulting from the wrath of the gods) accumulated by refusals to help relatives and friends. The behaviour of Gopalakutty was widely compared to that of a local widow who combines the running of an illegal arrack shop with occasional prostitution: 'Every day she sells liquor and then once a month she pays for a reading of the Bhagavad Gita in her house. The next day she thinks all the *dosham* is gone and she starts selling again'.

Soman, an Izhava, second of 10 brothers and sisters, had been working for a *company*[13], on a four-year contract, in Muscat (Oman), since 1982. For

12 years he had been working alongside two of his younger brothers, for whom he provided visas and jobs. Over this period, besides sending regular remittances for family subsistence, the three also saved for the marriages of their elder sisters, to pay for the education of their younger siblings and to build a new concrete house for their parents. In 1990, after eight years of being away, when Soman thought of returning permanently to Valiyagramam, his cousin-brother (MZS), a medical representative, asked to borrow Rs 60,000 towards setting up a small medical shop. Soman willingly lent the money and the shop was opened, but after six months it had to be closed down for lack of business and profit. Soman lost more than a third of his savings and was forced to extend his contract, staying on in Muscat. Although villagers considered Soman as a shining example of moral behaviour, they also said that he was a *pavam*, that his amenable character and good intentions led him to be taken advantage of by his relatives. Behind his back, villagers gossiped about him and mocked him as foolish and weak. In his inability to discriminate between sound and unsound loan requests, he failed to display *buddhi*, the sense or wisdom which distinguishes adults from children. In his unwillingness to refuse any request for help, he showed himself as lacking in masculine resolve and autonomy.

Here, we see some delicate movements between fragmented and essentialist orientations towards identity formation. While being a *kallan* is considered a positive attribute at the moment of accumulation of wealth in the Gulf, once back in Kerala a migrant should behave like a social person, willingly prepared to utilize wealth to fulfil obligations and promote the well-being of relatives and close friends. Those *gulfan*s who fail to do so, continuing to behave like self-interested, individualistic, immoral and anti-social *kallanmar* (thieves) towards their own people (*bandhukkal*) become subject to condemnation, criticism and social boycott. They are able to stake claims for neither maturity nor adult masculinity. However, the behaviour of those *gulfan*s who, by dutifully discharging their obligations end up dissipating their savings, is also subject to widespread condemnation: while publicly praised, they are privately ridiculed as *pavangal*, highly moral people of good intentions and behaviour who can do no harm to anyone, but who are gullible and can be taken advantage of. While the description '*pavam*' is widely pronounced in terms of approval when speaking of women—brides, elder sisters, mothers-in-law—who should ideally be adjustable, kindly and free of intrigue, when speaking of men the term has malicious overtones. Spoken by one man of another, the judgement '*pavam*' is often accompanied by a smirk, implying that the speaker is more worldly wise, more masculinely competent; as a judgement of a man spoken between women it

is heavily ambivalent, implying a man who is at once undemanding and easy to handle, but by virtue of failure to assert or dominate, somewhat feminized. The ambivalences and tensions expressed here find parallels in other locations: Yang's study of Chinese *guanxi* relationships of mutual help and patronage refers to the categories *you*—the 'oily' or 'greasy' person adept at manipulating *guanxi* relations, simultaneously distrusted and admired; and the *laoshi*—both 'honest' and reliable' but also 'malleable', 'obedient' and 'mindless' (Yang 1994:64ff).

Moving Towards Balance: The *Gulfan* Gift

Ideally, the migrant resolves tensions between *kallan* and *pavam* modalities by finding a mediating balance between ameliorating his own social and economic position while assisting the advancement of the larger group. A carefully planned strategy of gift giving can offer an effective way of doing so, while simultaneously offering the *gulfan* an opportunity to move from immature, marginal *payyan* towards the decidedly mature and masculine status of man-at-the-centre (cf. Raheja 1988; Mines and Gourishankar 1990; Mines 1994). By giving gifts and showing munificence, albeit at a calculated rate, the migrant can appear to live up to the stereotypical image, and thus masculine prestige, of the *gulfan* as consumer and displayer of 'easy money', while gradually increasing his control and mastery of others, another index of dominant masculinity.

Whoever goes away to work is expected on return to bring presents not only to the direct household but also to a large number of relatives, neighbours and friends (cf. Werbner 1990:203-4; Addleton 1992:139; Gardner 1993:12). From the point of view of the donor, the migrant worker, these gifts hold multiple meanings, which can be manipulated in different ways (cf. Werbner 1990:229). Through voluntary gift-giving, migrants retain some control over how much to give and to whom, thereby pre-empting potentially limitless demands for large cash gifts and loans which threaten hard-earned savings and lead towards *pavam*hood: prestige values attached to *foreign items* in some way compensates for lesser monetary values.

Gifts are also given to avoid evil eye and ill feelings aroused by envy of migrants' alleged prosperity (cf. Ames 1966:35; Good 1982:27). Recipients of *gulfan* gifts take them as tangible proof of relations with the donor, and as evidence of the continuity of affection (*sneham*) between parties in the face of temporary separation and reputed social advance. As the metonymic embodiment of the migrant's *sneham* or love and care (Osella and Osella 1996), gifts reiterate kinship relations and friendships: as such, they prove

that a *gulfan* is not a ruthless, uncaring *kallan* and that he has both the maturity and the substance to recognize and sustain important social relationships.

At the same time, opportunities for gift giving can be used instrumentally to create new and transform existing social relationships. Given to those of higher-status, gifts establish relations of goodwill, and are said to *soap* (mollify) the recipient. Non-reciprocal gifts can also be passed downwards to create and maintain a network of clients; in this way, migrants can ensure some return for considerable outlays, becoming not *pavam* but patron, a big man at the centre of a nexus of social relations, enjoying high-status and wide reputation, and exemplifying the local working out of a more widespread style of dominant masculinity as represented by the value of 'centrality' discussed by Raheja (1988a; 1988b; cf. e.g. Strathern 1988; Yang 1994). That attempts towards resolution are tilted in the direction of *kallan*-ness is indicated by the tendency among successful migrants to extend patronage via strategic gift-giving to their close circle, representing kinship obligations as the voluntary open-hearted largesse of a patron. Recipients not in a financial position to resist being assimilated as clients will publicly continue to receive gifts as their just dues. That the new relationship is tacitly understood is demonstrated by migrants' increased demands for assistance and services, going far beyond normal kinship obligations, by their non-reciprocation of such services and by the meek compliance of gift receivers. A migrant who uses raw masculine power—cash—wisely can then manoeuvre himself into a more prestigious masculine arena and expand his reach.

Money and Patronage

By exploring the figure of the Gulf migrant in its ideal pattern and in relation to the essentialized categories used locally as mooring points for otherwise precarious and fragmented selves doing continual identity work, we can see over time the unfolding of a particular approved trajectory and style of masculinity. A successful *gulfan* is a man who enriches himself by circumventing rules that normally tie the accumulation of wealth to labour. Money is the basis of the migrant's success and he should display an almost careless attitude to it, 'easy come, easy go' suggesting both huge wealth and endless possibilities of making more with little effort. If he ceases to indulge in lavish and conspicuous consumption, he instantly puts his financial situation in doubt and hence loses his main claim to status: the *gulfan* represents the dream of a never-ending spree of huge, effortless

accumulation and massive spending which nevertheless does not make a dent in his vast reserves. In this, he appears as hyper-masculine, a characteristic also suggested by him outshining others in displays of masculine competence undertaken in all-male performance arenas, such as card and drinking sessions with male friends, visits to prostitutes, paying for *treats* (cf. Colman 1990; e.g. Hertzfeld 1985; Loizos and Papataxiarchis [eds.] 1991).

What helps make migration particularly relevant to masculinity is its enhanced relationship with money, as an externalisable (detachable) form of masculine potency, and a means of exerting agency at a distance. Cash—as liquidity, as power, as flowing substance, as means to enjoyment and to the support of dependants—holds an important place in south India as a central aspect of prestigious styles of manhood. The returning migrant's dilemma, that of striking the balance between becoming a *pavam* or a *kallan*, that of spending all his cash or selfishly holding on to it, is analogous to another 'dilemma of substance' allegedly faced by all adult men and much discussed in ethnographic literature (see Chapter 6). This is the difficult requirement to balance expenditure of semen, a liquid flowing masculine substance which must also be accumulated, conserved carefully and channelled in socially (re)productive directions. Historicising and hence locating this apparent 'dilemma' in wider politico-economic processes—rejecting dominant psycho-social explanations—Srivastava has argued that an early middle-class orientation towards saving and deferral of gratification brings together '… the discourse of semen-conservation and that of "nation building"' which is being supplanted by the emergence of a 'corporeal masculinity where…the qualities of the male commodity are much more immediately expressible' making, for example, expenditure of semen via masturbation an unproblematic and 'harmless pastime' (2004: 200–1). Following a similar analytical direction, which identifies correspondences between money and semen as rooted in metonymic principles of resemblance, we find that connotations of lack, of promiscuous excess spending or of individualistic refusal to spend, are similar in each case with regard to both semen and money. Successful negotiation of the idealized trajectory requires initial accumulation—as exemplified by the working lives of KVK and Satyan discussed in the previous chapter—followed by controlled and judicious expenditure in which the element of containment is concealed, hidden beneath an adopted aesthetic of excess and ease (cf. Bourdieu and Bataille on contrasts between petty bourgeois accumulation and aristocratic expenditure: Bourdieu 1984; Botting and Wilson 1997:176; Bataille 1962).

The process of transformation of the migrant into a patron runs concomitant with and shares similar predicaments with the growth-cycle into manhood. A moment of accumulation corresponds to youth (*payyan*hood, celibacy) and to migration, in which a young man has few responsibilities or dependents. At this moment, young men are released from childish dependent status. They continually assert their new claims by engaging in competitive performances of extreme masculinity: this is a moment of motorbikes and hard partying and of self-directed consumption of items which will enhance the male body (clothes, grooming products). Return marks a period of reintegration, the *gulfan* moving towards adult social status by marrying and taking a place within the community. During the moment of accumulation, the house and land unit (analogous to the self, see e.g. Daniel 1984; Carsten and Hugh-Jones (eds.) 1995; Osella and Osella 2004) is built up and given substance, using remittances. When a satisfactory and socially reasonable level of individual/household improvement has been reached, the migrant's attention can and should turn outwards. At the dangerous point of achieving hyper-masculinity (hyper cash) but lack of maturity, the migrant should move forward if he is to engage with an idealized adult manhood, a hegemonic ideal masculinity associated with a balanced combination of masculinity and maturity, and a more 'toned down' style of masculine performance.

The performance of the *gulfan* who remains a complete *kallan*, failing to become a social man, will be judged a failure in so far as he remains asocial, immaturely individual, and not astute enough to take political advantage of the opportunities and expectations that his wealth generates: mere wealth may be enough for a young man, but dominant masculinity demands far more. The performance of the *gulfan* who does not retain control of his money, who gives in indiscriminately to the demands of those who have a moral claim upon his wealth will also be considered unsuccessful. He displays weakness as well as lack of discernment and insight; people take advantage of his wealth without acknowledging his prestige or position as a patron. As a result, like the anti-social *gulfan* (the *kallan*), the *pavam* also fails in his masculine performance by having neither dependents nor clients. Having depleted his resources, for no returns in terms of prestige, he also loses the chance to use to their full extent the potentiality that spending and displaying wealth confers. Wealth alone suggests masculinity but not maturity, the other essential component of manhood; maturity demands *bhuddi* and the wise use of resources, a quality lacking in both *kallan* and *pavam*. By fulfilling obligations in a way which places himself as a patron at the centre of a web of dependents and clients, between the two opposite poles of failure or unrealized potentialities emerges an ideal

of successful adult man who, having accumulated enough resources, manages to find a skilful balance between the pull of social obligations and the need to retain control of his resources—in other words between spending and saving. After hard labour, which is generally involved in accumulation (as we have seen in the last chapter), a man must undertake more hard work in using that cash wisely.

Conclusions; Householder as Housebuilder

Houses are an important form of symbolic capital and masculine status: with current high prices, a concrete house in a 'good' location is an obvious indication of the wealth and prestige of the owner. The house is the long-lasting and concrete embodiment of a family, its worth and reputation, indicated in the identity between family and house names. It is widely understood as the objectification of the worth of the family's senior male, the householder, who provides the cash to buy land and build the house. One young woman complained that her family, formerly of medium wealth and status, had lost its position (*sthanam*). She illustrated her argument by pointing to the new brick houses that have lately replaced the thatched huts surrounding her family's old wooden three-roomed house. 'When this house was built [1950s], it was the grandest around here, now it's nothing. This house is exactly the same as it was when my father inherited it. He hasn't extended or improved it at all.' Her implication, as understood by her depressed father and worried mother, is that her father's life has been a failure: he has nothing to show. Her complaint also underlines the point that masculine prestige, being relative, is an ever-shifting goal.

A man's first duty, after marrying and fathering children, is to build or improve the family home, leaving behind (usually to his youngest son) something of value and which speaks of a certain status. Buying, renovating or building a house is a priority for those who are mobile, as they replace thatched or wooden huts. As considerable capital is required to build a new house, this is usually a long-term goal; for overseas migrants, it might require more than one period of migration. The choice of building materials—concrete or the less expensive bricks or breeze blocks—is in itself a matter of prestige. A concrete house is an indication not only of the affluence of the owner but also of his sophistication and taste. Villas, often built according to a standard plan, are reminiscent of the luxury bungalows occupied by the rich and Westernized characters in popular Malayalam films. Since concrete houses have become relatively common, so that they have been built by many who are not even high earners or migrants, but

mere salaried employees, the wealthy maintain distinction by introducing new fashions, such as the 'neo-traditional' *nalukettu* style. Others, already committed to an opulent modern villa, have made expensive additions to already grand mansions. As new items for house-improvement become available in Kerala, those who are able to buy them make their houses 'grow' (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995).

Houses are constructed over a period of years: the ritual placing of a foundation stone is like a *nercha* (vow) and is a public commitment to build, years before the cash to continue work is raised. Side extensions, verandahs, extra storeys, may all be added long after the original house has been built. A house is a never-finished project: as a family's wealth, reputation, prestige and membership grows, the house will also grow. Or, as is often the case with migrant-built houses, funds might not be available to either complete or maintain it. Houses do not merely reflect the status of their inhabitants: they constitute an objectification of the householder and of the latter's name and reputation, and act both as a source and as a target of quality. The new family house, then, stands metaphorically for masculinity itself: unfinished, never complete or lacking in resources for its complete realization.

The ethnography we presented suggests an articulation between fragmented and contradictory everyday experiences of masculinity expressed, for example, in the dilemmas faced by Gulf migrant returnees and in the divergence between the labour conditions under which capital has been accumulated and its representation back in the village. It also suggests a number of essentialized and differently valued gendered identities—that of *gulfan*, *pavam*, *kallan* or patron/householder/housebuilder—against which male performance is gauged. Strauss argues that post-modern subjects enmeshed in complex relations of global capital do indeed experience the self as split and contradictory, but that partial integration of fragmented selves may be effected by means of reference to 'emotionally salient life experiences' (1997). In the Kerala case, the illusion of partial integration of, or as we would prefer, articulation between different aspects of the self, takes place through reference to the passage from boyhood to manhood, a process involving labour, marriage and fatherhood, and is framed within a culturally stereotyped idealized trajectory towards a strongly essentialized identity which draws as much on post-19th century notions of bourgeois paterfamilias and householder as it does on longer extant ideas about patronage and centrality, both associated with specific orientations towards consumption.

But in talking about the 'householders' and indeed 'housebuilders' who support dependents, starting with their families, we are taking for granted

the existence of that family. While it has become common to interrogate the modernists' break-up of matriliny and imposition of new family forms (Kodoth 2001; Arunima 2003; Menon 1994; cf. Stivens 1996), the production of the core husband-wife unit is less commonly examined. In the next chapter we will move to think about the production of heterosexuality.

Notes

1. Recent work on marriage and conjugality in Delhi suggests that working class women continue to define a 'good husband' primarily as a 'good provider' (Grover 2005: 43ff).
2. While this transience-permanence dichotomy is similar to that described by Miller in Trinidad (1994), local evaluation of the terms is very different.
3. Price (1996:100ff) notes the growing importance in nineteenth century Tamil Nadu of cash as a tool in politics and alliance-making.
4. From our most recent fieldwork in Calicut, we find that religious restrictions regarding accumulation of interest and the absence of Islamic banks, together with a generalized orientation towards business and trade, draw local Muslims towards the investment of Gulf cash into petty trade (Osella and Osella forthcoming).
5. Cf. Born's description of French academics' 'splitting' spheres of production from consumption and her analysis that this results in split subjectivities (1997:492).
6. Kerala's Islamic reform movements have been conducting many a campaign to make charitable donations completely anonymous.
7. Again, the abolition of matriliny has removed many similar occasions, notably the *talikettukalyanam*, notoriously a ruinously expensive celebration held for pre-pubescent girls.
8. Current trends amongst Calicut Muslim men who follow Islamic prescriptions against wearing 'yellow' gold include the use of silver or 'white' gold jewellery made ornate by precious stones.
9. Other *Gulfanmar*, especially those who have made substantial economic gains, are said to have become rich by deceiving business partners, running prostitution rings, marrying and then murdering wealthy widows, or by making use of *manthravadam* (sorcery).
10. Display of goods and cash might be problematic, since public shows of wealth could leave the holder open to misfortunes caused by evil eye, or the jealousy of neighbours. Envy and jealousy are feared, being among the most obvious motives for resorting to the use of *manthravadam* (sorcery), something which many agree is on the rise.
11. We note, once again, that such orientations are community based. For Calicut Muslims it is the successful, well-connected businessman who plays a similar role in popular imagination.
12. To pre-empt this accusation, manual workers commonly send home a photograph of themselves in an office, posing at a desk with a pen or typewriter.
13. This is the commonest, deliberately vague, description of employment volunteered by those who are, presumably, doing non-prestigious jobs.

CHAPTER 5

Producing Heterosexuality: Flirting and Romancing

Kerala's Heterosexual Hegemony

The terrain of south Asian male sexuality and attitudes towards women has been over-determined, since the 1950s, by Freudian psychoanalytic approaches and by one conclusion—that heterosexual relations are approached, from the male side at least, with little short of dread. This we find rather odd, given that it is already clear from what we have said earlier about men's life histories and goals that marriage, fatherhood and householder status are valorized. Heterosexuality across south Asia is presumed, carefully cultivated, strictly policed and utterly naturalized, in a reproductive-based nexus of compulsory (arranged) marriage and parenthood, which is a great example of Rubin's 'traffic in women'—the means by which gender and sexuality have been yoked together and then, as a system, serve the perpetuation of inequality and power relations (Rubin 1975)[1]. We have written elsewhere about the process of arranging and celebrating a marriage, paying a dowry and so on (Osella and Osella 2000a: 81ff). Here, we are more interested in exploring some moments of interaction in which heterosexuality is produced and explored. We follow local usage, which refers to unmarried young men and women as 'boys' and 'girls', though they may be up to 30-years-old[2]. Such terminology is an infantilising move common right across south Asia, which serves to reinforce age hierarchies in general and parental control in particular.

Great stress is put in Kerala, as in south Asia generally, on marriage and parenthood; popular movies and songs are unashamedly hetero-romantic; the web of assumptions, social structures, sanctions and value judgements about sexuality work to produce young men and women who take it for

granted that they will marry and produce children. In the course of the 20th century, as the patrilineal nuclear household usurps the pre-colonial, and as styles of global domesticity perpetrated by the media increasingly hold sway, ideas of affection and a tight conjugal unit have come in to sweeten the mix. Young people today are sometimes encouraged to imagine that they will in some way 'fall in love' with their spouse post-marriage.

A degree of gender segregation is generally observed across south Asia, with certain social locations more insistent than others. Within India, south India is at the conservative end of the scale, such that even sophisticated and educated urban families are gender conservative compared with their class counterparts in, for example, Gujarat or Punjab. Along with segregation goes homosociality, and Kerala has many spaces where men enjoy each other's exclusive company. There is an issue here of the degree to which, if at all, homosociality shades into homosexuality. In Chapter 8, we will discuss some of the analytical and representational issues that arise when we enter this very charged debate, and in our next monograph we will more profoundly come to grips with some of these issues. Here, we simply state equivocally that homosociality may sometimes help frame and sustain homosexual relationships—and sometimes it may not (Balachandran 2004; Seabrook 1999:103; Boyce in press). On the one hand, 'ongoing same-sex relations, for both men and women, often coexist with the obligations and privileges of marriage, and may function as the primary erotic and emotional relationship' (Vanita 2002: 3). And Seabrook concurs that, "Friendship, in this sense, is a very significant thing…it has a special role in the lives of Indian men", yet he finds that, 'Neither of the two men is impressed by my assertion that there is a powerful undertow of eroticism in relationships between Indian men.' (Seabrook 1999:145).

During our Valiyagramam fieldwork, we were aware of some very discreet scenes of male homosexuality: young unmarried lads who had special friendships; stories of adventures in college hostels, Gulf migrant bachelor houses and other all-male arenas; the occasional *sanyasi* (renouncer) who appeared to have had clear affective and sexual reasons for rejecting marriage; rumours and jokes about 'masters of sawing'—older married men who were known to be fond of younger men's company and physical contact. But it was always clear that all this was held by most people as shameful, secret, aberrant, and served only to highlight what was expected of all mature adults—sexuality contained exclusively within heterosexual marriage, with a partner chosen by one's family. In our more recent urban fieldwork, we have found quite a different picture, where some fairly open, relaxed and playful men's homosexual scenes co-exist comfortably with

marriage and fatherhood (cf. Seabrook 1999:16ff on compulsory marriage and how it articulates with homosexuality). We will be writing about this material in our monograph on Calicut (forthcoming), but our focus in this chapter is on the production of normative heterosexuality in Kerala.

Foucault argued that, 'Sexuality must not be seen as a drive, which is alien and disobedient to power, but as "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power"…' (cited by Caplan in her Introduction to 'The Cultural Construction of Sexuality', 1987: 7). A wealth of work since (the early) 1980s has explored both this Foucaultian insistence on sex as point of power and (the early) Gayle Rubin's suggestion that sex and gender together form a sex/gender system, which is implicated in the perpetuation of female oppression[3]. Here, we take on board both these insights and explore the ways in which they sometimes run together as in the production of the conjugal pair and sometimes pull apart as when women participate in aggressive sexualized flirting outside the *lakshman rekha* (circle of containment) of purity and arranged marriage (following Abraham 2004).

Flirting and Romance: Shared Secrets

Sexuality is supposed to be contained within marriage. While Christians, Brahmins and low-caste Pulayas have always been patrilineal, the large mid-status Hindu castes of Nayars (*savarna*: not untouchable but not twice-born) and Izhavas (*avarna*: just below 'untouchability thresholds') were, until the turn of this century, matrilineal. With the transformations of kinship over the 20th century, Kerala sexuality was firmly re-drawn into the Indian modern (cf. John & Nayar 1998). By the 1990s, arranged, dowried, hypergamous, stranger marriage had become the commonest and most desirable form of marriage. Young men and women alike, marrying for the most part in their early twenties, are expected not to have had any pre-marital relationships; while some engage in illicit pre-marital affairs and even elopements and while some enjoy discreet same-sex experiences, many more content themselves with flirtations and romances.

As in popular films (be they American or Indian), romance often begins in aggression and apparent mutual hostility (Kolenda 1990:144; Toren 1994). That the seeds of love should flourish in what could look like hatred or harassment is just the first of many ambiguities to come. Single-sex colleges and segregated buses are common throughout Kerala; in mixed areas of public space, groups of young men make a sport of verbally and physically harassing girls and women. In town, boys may try to touch a girl, but around Valiyagramam this is limited to crowded occasions, such as temple

festivals, where boys take advantage of the crowds to push up against girls and touch them; some girls carry safety-pins to stab silently into the back of the hand of gropers and pinchers. What was common around the village, as right across south Asia, are sexualized remarks; in Valiyagramam, we often heard the terms *vandi* (lit. vehicle) and *charakku* (lit. commodity, goods) aimed at girls passing on the road.

One way of reading this harassment is as an expression of hierarchic heterosexuality, as described by Brittan (1989)—an exaggeration and clear hierarchisation of gender, the boy acting as aggressively active, hyper-masculine, the girl as hyper-feminine, a passive victim. This makes some sense: theatrical demonstrations of powerful and potent heterosexuality, premised upon a clear gender hierarchy and validated by the peer group, offer young men the opportunity to experiment with a new subject-position: that of the potent, penetrating male, who is able to subjugate and dominate woman. In a recent paper at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (Chicago, 2005), titled 'Between Sex and Education: Gender, Violence, and the Public in Kerala, India' Ritty Lukose analysed Kerala 'Eve-teasing' (harassment) in such terms. However, such strong readings overlook the fact that in an environment of relative segregation and widespread pre-marital virginity, young men's active heterosexuality is largely an acted-out 'play'; the penetrating, potent male is a fantasy, a young man's swagger (cf. Rogers 2005: 146ff for a nuanced discussion of 'eve teasing' in a Chennai college). Any purpose it serves as a performative gesture of masculinity is weakened by a general understanding that this is, after all, hyperbole. Older men and women alike treat young men as 'boys', dependent and immature males who have no real claims to the stuff of adult masculinity: a wife, a home, children or the ability to provide others rather than being provided for.

Aggressive harassment of girls is also only part of the story; idealized romance is equally important. Aspirations towards heroism and romance are played out among young men, who appreciate and respect the culturally recognized figure of 'The Artist', envisaged as a romantic individual. To be artistic is admired as indicative of refined sensibilities and of specialness. Many boys get involved (through boys' clubs, schools or college) in some sort of artistic activity: singing or playing an instrument in the case of those wealthy enough to pay for lessons; acting, reciting poetry, drawing or writing for the less well off. Almost all memorize *cinema* song lyrics and segments of flowery *dialogue*. All this appears in startling contrast to the harassing *vaayi nokki* (young man on the street/ogler/layabout): a young man can be both a sensitive creature, and an aggressive lout; he is equally capable of

artistic endeavour and physical assault. Public discussions (including academic ones) of youthful masculinity invariably focus on the *vaayi nottam* or 'Eve-teasing' aspect of young men's relations with girls, and entirely overlook these other parts of the relationship, failing to make it adequately complex. They are also generally grounded in simplistic ideas about gender identities, gender hierarchies and their alleged fixedness (e.g. Antony 1991). When we address the links between harassment and flirting, aggression and love and the difficulties in identifying the differences, these questions become even less amenable to easy answers.

Despite boys' expressions of aggression towards girls and women, and despite an apparent mutual hostility between the sexes, almost all boys are keen to induce a girl to flirt (*tune*) or to *romance* with them: minimally to exchange glances, photographs and letters; more daringly, to go to the *cinema* or for ice-cream, coffee or snacks together, in a suitably distant place. The romantic and artistic endeavours of boys often fail to find an object or appreciative audience: it is hardly less dangerous for a girl to express public admiration of a boy's poem or drawing than to admire the boy himself. Here, young men fall back upon each other and the homosocial safe space; they meet in groups to share poetry, act out scenes from films, sing love songs and show each other their writings or drawings; an element of competition generally creeps in.

Against their families' best efforts, young men and women do find opportunities to talk to each other: at weddings, festivals, bus-stops, temple, choir practice, around college, whenever girls feel confident of being either unobserved or safe from gossips. Contact begins with *tuning*, a tentative exchange between the two, and often stops at this point, if the girl fails to respond to the boy's opening questions. If she proves ready to speak and take things further, however, the two have a *line*, a mutual agreement to speak (and exchange glances) when they meet by chance, and possibly to send letters and cards (cf. Ahearn 2001). Regular conversations and correspondence may eventually lead to *romance* or *love*, involving pre-arranged secret meetings. Like the street displays of aggressive sexuality, romance (*love*) stakes out arenas in which boys compete, are judged by their peers, and form themselves into hierarchies around masculine performance (Hertzfeld 1985; Abu-Lughod 1986, 1990; Yelvington 1996:325; De Neve 2001).

All the *tuning* conversations we ever witnessed (both actual conversations and their representations in films) followed an almost stereotyped form, a standardized opening eliciting an expected response. This is because it is almost a set-piece, an example of a semi-formalized speech act. It is often

difficult to tell whether a boy's first remark is intended as harassment or as an opening gambit: while the ambiguity is certainly intentional and may be interpreted as utilitarian, permitting a face-saving withdrawal in the event of a non-response, we prefer to refer back to anthropological and linguistic literature on similar behaviours, and to see the ambiguity as an essential part of the game, the pleasure and the aesthetics of social interaction (e.g. Brenneis 1987:503ff).

A boy, having approached a girl and initiated contact, either by means of some trivial remark, (often a brusque demand—'Has the bus gone yet?') or through an aggressive comment about her ('She's looking flashy!'), tries to keep the interaction going, as he continually edges physically closer and closer towards the girl. She, her face showing a mixture of expressions of irritation and amusement, will side-step, back off, and move away. If her girlfriends are present (they usually are), she will appeal to them with looks that suggest, 'Look at this person who won't leave me alone: what can I do?' They in turn look sympathetic, but do not intervene. In contrast to genuine harassment, in which boys act as a backing group to a major player, while a girl's friends close in around her protectively, in *tuning* the friends hover quietly in the background and play no part other than audience. While these audiences, the friends, do not substitute the protagonists or play an active part in the action, their supportive presence in the early stages is essential (as in the Caribbean, Brenneis 1987: 506). Filmic representations of flirting and the early stages of romance also commonly frame the protagonists within a same-sex group.

As the would-be romancer speaks, he leans towards the girl while using a forceful, loud and commanding or challenging tone; this gives an impression at least of aggression, at most of actual threatened attack. The content of his speech is in the same attacking, challenging style, and often includes sexual double-meanings or even insults, such as disparaging comments on the girl's physical appearance. The overall effect is to rupture physical and social distance, reducing formality and restraint, and bringing the girl and the boy into the same space. There are many ethnographic instances of similar phenomena: semi-public situations in which suggestive and aggressive remarks are made with extreme indirection—not so much towards a girl as at her, or in her presence (Antiguan 'passing remarks', Trinidadian 'dropping words', Cuban *indirectas*; see e.g. Reisman 1970, cited in Brenneis 1987; Yelvington 1996:316-17). While Malayali openings to flirtation are often less indirect, a girl (safe within the protective circle of her girlfriends) may still choose simply to ignore the boy, often by pretending that his remarks are not intended for her or that she cannot hear them. Ambiguity

about the remark's meaning, speaker's intentions, and intended audience is carefully maintained. Eventually, a girl will choose whether to interpret the remarks as unwanted harassment or as an attempt to provoke a reaction and open communication. The meaning, then, of a young man leaning towards a well-endowed young woman weighted down with school books, and remarking, 'What a heavy load to carry!', is not transparent and cannot be prejudged. Indeed, the *double-entendre* is a staple of both Malayali humour generally and of many informal interactions. Being quick to make or pick up on a smutty double meaning is a matter of skill and in many contexts admired. Here, we remember Trawick's Tamil ethnography, which also suggests that ambiguity in south India is both valued for itself and is clearly elaborated as an aesthetic (e.g. 1990:37-43, 242-258, 265-268; cf. Parish 1996:101ff and *passim*).

If a girl chooses to interpret a boy's remarks as an opening gambit and decides to respond, she does so using culturally stereotyped signs of deference or nervousness. These can include giggling, putting her hand over her mouth, playing with her hair, twisting the end of her *sari* or *shawl*[4], and turning her face away or looking at her feet. Again, the actions are ambiguous: it is impossible to judge the extent to which they are unconscious feminized reactions to dominance born from the (embodied) habitus, or conscious manipulations of the gestural language of submission: to ponder over such issues would be to miss the point entirely. The boy, the audience of friends and any observing bystanders alike cannot know the extent to which a girl is genuinely feeling nervous or embarrassed or the degree to which she is consciously exaggerating feminine behaviours. The pair are then, through their physical interaction, playing out complex patterns of dominance and submission, in a more subtle form of hierarchic heterosexuality than in harassment (cf. Trawick 1990: 111ff; Brittan 1989:18). However, as they engage in this process, which corresponds to what Bateson called direct schismogenesis or difference-reinforcing behaviour—in other words, playing gender (and ironising it by exaggeration)—they add another dimension, which is that of diagonal schismogenesis or symmetrical rivalry, characterized by aggression and apparent hostility (Bateson 1958:271; cf. Strathern 1988:334ff).

The conversation's content contrasts strongly with its boy-dominates-girl physical style. A girl responds to a boy's remarks with speedy verbal counter-attack and counter-challenge. That she occasionally glances quickly upwards into his eyes before swiftly looking demurely downwards again piles on the ambiguity: this eye-contact can be taken as direct aggressive confrontation, a challenge. But it can also be an actual exchange and offer

of something. ‘The look’ in Kerala, as across south Asia generally, has an acknowledged power; eye contact is a form of physical connection (Eck 1981; Babb 1981). The overall effect is that of a battle of wits or verbal duel; in fact, one of the preferred forms of flirting is that in which a pair try to outwit each other by posing riddles, or by contradicting or mock-insulting each other. If either type of interaction goes too far, as when the boy simply harasses the girl, or if the pair begin to trade strong or over-obscene insults, the whole process collapses and interaction ceases. If, on the other hand, banter is contained within what are felt by the participants to be appropriate limits, and if direct visual and verbal contact is successfully established, the boy and girl now have a *line*. Many couples stay on this level, trading glances and smart remarks when they pass on the road or meet at the temple or in church.

This movement, from one-way harassment into mutual casual *tuning* and then onto getting a *line* (an established flirting relationship) is very similar to the progression which Yelvington (1996) describes in Trinidad from *sooting* (aggressive harassment) to *tracking* (flirting). Yelvington describes factory flirting in Trinidad between female line workers of African or East Indian descent, and their male, generally White, supervisors. Under headings such as ‘sexual politics’, he analyses flirting as an accommodation by lower-status females to hierarchical work, race and gender roles, and as ‘one way in which men control women’ (1996:329). Yelvington suggests that this is a means by which males (in this case, supervisors) keep young women (in this case, workers) docile by means of implicit threat of ‘actual, inegalitarian, sexual relations’ (1996:328). Such readings are both literalist and lacking in a sense of the aesthetics of flirting; they also fail to nuance the complexities of gender and of the ambiguities of gendered interaction. Yelvington’s reluctance to deal with the fact that in Trinidad aggressive harassment (*sooting*) can lead to love is indicative of this, although he clearly recognizes that—as in India—it plays a part of the same trajectory. Ritty Lukose’s work on gender in Kerala is similarly lacking in close exploration of local nuance; Lukose (n.d.) draws together under a generalized heading of ‘sexual harassment’ a variety of specific cross-gender interactions and again applies a one-way focus on the aggression passed from male to female, without discerning any agency on the part of the female subjects enmeshed in these relations.

Suzanne Seizer offers another example of analysis which sees joking as working to maintain, not to rupture, hierarchy and bourgeois morality (1997). She examines a comedy performance before a south Indian Tamil mixed audience in which women snigger discreetly at a young man’s

'private' asides to his friend about his experiences on a crowded bus. She argues that 'Nothing… is disrupted here', and analyses the performance as a 'rhetorical device that allows actual Tamil women to hear dirty jokes without falling off their assigned moral pedestal' (1997:63, 81; cf. De Neve 2001). Seizer's analysis of this 'dirty joking' in mixed company suffers, like Yelvington and Lukose's analyses, from reluctance to appreciate nuances of ambiguity and to explore ambivalence. In Kerala, as across south Asia, innocence and prudery form part of most women's public persona; but privately, we find that women do talk dirty with each other, joke frankly about sexual matters and flirt with men. For us, the comedic effect of the episode Seizer describes could rest (at least partly) upon its theatrical parody of the excesses of bourgeois morality. On stage, even an aged grandmother suspects a young man of sexually harassing her; another—innocent—young man dare not approach a young woman to retrieve his valuable lost property, for fear of being misunderstood by her as making a sexual advance. For us, inherent in this Tamil parody is the shared assumption that men and women alike are trapped by public morality[5]. The comedy threatens to make public 'hidden scripts' about sexuality, and alludes to women's secret natures: it is women, supposedly innocent and pure, who repeatedly take the 'wrong'—dirty—meaning from the young man's innocently intended double-entendre; women in the audience likewise are not innocent, but clearly 'get' the double meanings. And albeit framed within distancing mechanisms, the performance does allow dirty joking before a mixed audience, (1997:82; see also 2005). If, as Seizer argues, Special Drama reiterates and enforces conventional morality, we need to explain why it is especially relished among those least confined within conventional discourses of ignorance, purity and chastity—young men, manual labourers. Could it be that Special Drama actually brings to half-light (in a way similar to other folk forms) a degree of non-commitment to conventional bourgeois morality while alluding to the 'hidden' fact that women, too, have sexual knowledge and actively participate in sexual arenas (e.g. Raheja and Gold 1994)?

We turn towards more complex readings. Gough (1959) notes that joking in matrilineal societies was common between cross-cousins; the latter were (and still are) potential marriage partners for Izhava and Nayar Hindu communities in Travancore. Though increasing preference for hypergamous stranger marriage means that they now rarely marry, cross-cousins continue to be preferred as 'safe' joking and flirting partners (cf. Radcliffe-Brown 1940). As one young man explained, 'Your parallel cousin can ask you, "Take me down the market for shopping"—they're like a sister;

but your cross-cousin can ask you, "Take the heat off me"' (make love to me). Flirtation can then most usefully be seen as a particular type of joking—one that hints at sexual possibilities. And joking is an activity which is notable for rupturing hierarchy and turning distance to empathy. As Kolenda, writing about affinal joking in hypergamous north India, puts it, 'Out of the tomfoolery comes *prem* or *pyar*, affection and love' (1990:144).

This interpretation leads us back towards George Simmel, who understands flirting to be a game whose instrument is reality, a play in which status differences are suspended and erotic offers and refusals are made (1984:144/5). Yelvington's ethnography, which clearly shows women and men initiating and enjoying teasing, insults and obscene talk, could easily be re-read in Simmel's terms; one of his informants explicitly refers to the activity as 'play' (1996:323). Simmel understands flirting as a game in which hierarchy is also far from clear: power is often in the hands of the female player: 'In saying no and saying yes, in surrendering and refusing to surrender themselves, women are the masters… woman is the chooser…' (1984:140). Studies within gender theory of butch-femme dynamics in lesbian relationships or of sado-masochistic sexualities make a similar point: that there is no stable or obvious one-way power wielded by the apparently dominant partner over the apparently submissive, while often the 'bottom' is in reality the 'top', by virtue of the control s/he exercises over the other (e.g. Califia 1983, 1996 and Hopkins 1994, both cited in Sullivan 2004; cf. Queen 2005).

But the point of the flirting game, Simmel argues, is decidedly not erotic consummation: 'There is no real sequence in which what is gained... guarantees…that the decisive terminal value will be obtained…this also results in an increase in value…as a result of the fascination of risk, especially if the element of fate…heightens its mysterious attraction' (1984: 143). Deferment, denial and destiny are then what make this game possible; all three factors are certainly present in the south Asian case, where flirting partners are highly unlikely to become legitimate sexual partners and where 'love' is shot through with romantic *filmi* ideas about destiny, soul-mates, magnetic gazes and so on (Dwyer 2000:112).

Some analyses suffer from over-literality, a denial of local (particularly female) agency and an unwillingness to stomach the complex sensibilities which can be drawn into 'play'. The distinction between coercive harassment and consensual play is more problematic for outsiders than for players themselves. While Yelvington professes his reluctance to flirt, partly because of insecurity about competence, the men and women he describes are competent and clearly do recognize limits and boundaries (1996:323,

326). Insult, double-entendre, hostility and hierarchy in joking across social categories of race and sex are in no way open to unequivocal readings; far from reinforcing a dominant social context of hierarchy, they often act to confuse the issue (e.g. Donnan 1976; Miller 1994:228). In joking, unpredictability and ambivalence do not spoil the game but are part of it, standing right at its centre. At the same time, lines can be drawn between welcome and unwelcome incidents of talk (Yelvington 1996:323; Sykes 1966; Heald 1990). The difficulties that practitioners and anthropologists alike often experience in drawing this line should not lead us to throw in the towel and draw it around all category crossing interaction, seeing gender and racial hierarchies and their reinforcement everywhere we look.

We must stay alive to the possibilities and significance of play. Kerala young people, in their play, experiment with and are lured into webs of heterosexuality[6]. In semi-secret, semi-clandestine interaction, they draw responses from each other and enjoy a form of heterosexual charge, which appears transgressive, standing as it does outside of the kinship/family/reproductive nexus. But of course, while flirting transgresses certain structures (arranged marriage, chastity and so on) it also performs the work of drawing young people tightly into Kerala's heterosexual hegemony and attuning them to the possibilities of cross-sex relationships.

Gender Play

Boxer and Cortés-Conde write, 'It is axiomatic that conversational humour is a highly valued verbal art across societies' (1997:275). As in many places, play, *kaḷi*, is something simultaneously associated with lightness and meaninglessness and at the same time far from trivial, an aesthetic to be mastered for full cultural competence.

A Valiyagramam boy called out to a passing girl, 'I will take you into an alley and fuck you!' From a literalist point of view, this might be interpreted as a threat of rape and as reinforcing gender hierarchy (e.g. Yelvington 1996:329). The girl, in the spirit of *tuning*, in which aggressed becomes aggressor, retorted to the boy, 'Your father already did!', effectively refusing his overture, while shaming and insulting him, simultaneously claiming erotic power for herself and implying that she, a mature woman, was out of reach of this ineffectual small boy. This girl was not interested in the particular boy, and chose a deliberately over-stated response. In cases where a girl is willing to *tune*, aggressive backchat or initial refusal is still the order of the day, but it will be calculated just this side of serious insult or repulsion: flirtation is a dangerous and difficult game to play. Yelvington (1996:n2)

notes that he did not participate in flirting, both because of feminist principles and anxiety about 'getting it wrong': extreme cultural competence is needed to flirt—it is a highly complex activity. The hostility and aggression are mock, and must be carefully bounded lest they descend into serious insult (Sykes 1996; Heald 1990:85 on restraint in joking relations). Boxer and Cortés-Conde argue that, 'Conversational joking, when it involves teasing, functions on a continuum that ranges from bonding to nipping to biting'. All possibilities are therefore contained within the tease, and the eventual outcome or meaning of the interaction evolves as a result of the participants' interpretations and reactions. In the process of producing meanings, participants also develop their relational identities (1997:276).

When Meena, famous for her generous bosom, passed Sunil and Monsy along the road, Sunil shouted out, 'How do you manage to carry all that weight? Why don't you give me one of them to hold?' She called back, 'Okay, you come here and I'll give you one'. When she passed by the next day, Monsy this time asked her the same question, to receive the reply, 'I can't; I've already promised one to your friend Sunil; if I give you the other one, how will I feed my children when I get pregnant?' Meena responds to challenge with counter-challenge, and is keeping open *line*s with both boys, playing them off against each other. Unlike the Trinidadian situation, in which only men are generally reported as seeking 'fame' via multiple flirts (e.g. Freilich 1968, cited in Yelvington 1996: 317; Miller 1994:173, 229), in Kerala, boys and girls alike openly boast to intimates about the number of *line*s they can juggle, while both sexes achieve an enhanced sense of personal power through managing *lines*. All this ruptures easy assumptions about innocent and powerless south Asian girls.

The game may also have a physical aspect. The boldest boys may raise the stakes by 'stealing' a girl's school books. This has two possible outcomes: total collapse, as the girl decides that things have got out of hand and breaks contact; or increased intensity of interaction, as she either 'angrily' insists or plaintively 'beseeches' him to return her books. In her reactions to provocation, she can choose to stress either Bateson's direct schismogenesis (taking a submissive role, pleading) or diagonal schismogenesis (anger, retaliation, breaking away). That she can continue to hide her actual reactions under cover of pretence (mock distress, mock anger) adds to the confusion and interest of the game, yet again layering the ambiguity[7]. The boldest girls may even retaliate physically by slapping or pinching the boy, breaching the 'no-touch' rule. That this can reportedly have an electrifying impact can easily be imagined: people normally touch only close kin, small

children, and same-sex friends, certainly not cross-sex 'strangers'. The effect is not only one of sexual arousal: as we have discussed elsewhere, even same-sex touching within the peer group retains an air of transgressivity, in the context of touching prohibitions related to purity practices common among 'respectable' Hindu and Christian south Asians (Osella and Osella 2000a: 220ff).

Far from reinforcing gender hierarchy, then, the confusion in flirting between a girl's submissive demeanour and her vicious tongue, her continual rebuttal of advances and her physical approach, like her exaggerated submissiveness and actual firm control within the situation, is all part of a breaking down of normality, including distance and hierarchy, and a necessary prelude to the fostering of heterosexual intimacy. In *tuning*, young men and women seek to provoke reactions from each other, and to draw out hidden power: the power of touch and sexuality, and the power of control, which oscillates precariously between the pair. It is always a girl's decision whether she can take the potential risk to her reputation of moving forward into *romance* proper, involving secret pre-arranged meetings and letters; at this point, the normative hierarchical gender dyad, already confused by *tuning* behaviour, becomes reversed.

Intensifying a Line: Romance

When a girl signifies her willingness to take a *line* forward into *romance*, a suitor will drop his aggressive and hostile teasing manner in an abrupt about-face, which sees him composing poetry and memorising love songs. He will pass long, intense letters to the girl, begging for a photograph, a meeting, a return letter confirming her *love* for him (cf. Ahearn's 2001 discussion of love letters exchanged between Nepali youths). He will pine, profess loss of appetite, and engage his friends in long discussion about the best way to win the girl over. At this point, the love songs, poetry and demonstrations of artistic sensibility that have been largely reserved for competitive display within the peer group are brought into full play as part of a campaign of persuasion. The influence of *filmi* ('*cinema* style') ideas about love comes fully to bear at this point. The boy now takes the part of humble and ardent suitor, whose happiness (indeed whose life) totally depends upon the favours of his beloved. The roles within the romantic hierarchic-heterosexual dyad are a reversal of those in the initial harassment dyad, as the aggressive dominating would-be master becomes the humble, willing slave of a capricious mistress. *Cinema* plots and songs trace this familiar trajectory, from harassment to *tuning* and getting a *line,* through *romance* to

love proper. In the phase of love declared, many *cinema* love songs use the idiom of *bhakti* (religious devotion), explicitly comparing Woman to the unpredictable Devi, the goddess, while her lover is like the supplicant/devotee (cf. Dwyer 2000:41). But even this apparently clear relationship remains indeterminate: the deliberate taking up of a lowly position in regard to another can of course be a form of mastery, coercing the other into emotions of compassion and tenderness (see, for instance, Sykes 1966:191; Appadurai 1990; Whitehead 2002).

Although Beena (20), *tune*d with Priyadevan (24), when she saw him at the temple, she told him that as a respectable girl, she was not interested in doing *romance*. Priyadevan sent his younger sister (who was, of course, publicly innocent of the forbidden *line* between the two), with a love-letter, and instructions to tell Beena that he had not eaten for three days, was going around the house in misery and that the family were seriously worried about his health. This was an exaggeration, but his behaviour was certainly that of a preoccupied and unhappy man. Instead of hanging around the kitchen at mealtimes he mooned on the verandah, softly singing to himself; he came to be fed only when called by his mother. Beena did not send the hoped-for return letter, but continued to visit the temple and to cast long sideways glances towards the dejected Priyadevan. After many days, the younger sister was again dispatched with the worrying news that Priyadevan had been talking about a deep disappointment in his life, and hinting at suicide. Beena did not relent enough to compromise her reputation by putting anything in writing, but told Priyadevan when she saw him in the street alone that he could continue to send letters to her. After many weeks, during which time Priyadevan's discretion and sincerity were tested in many tiny humiliations and teases, Beena began to write return letters. The pair carried on this forbidden correspondence for six years, until Beena's marriage to another man. Priyadevan, as is common in such cases, attended the wedding.

A girl, even if she agrees to *romance*, is expected to remain reluctant and reticent, so extreme behaviour is necessary on the boy's part. This allows him to play romantic hero to the full, and for both boy and girl to cultivate the experience of *srngaram*. *Srngaram*—not exactly rendered by the English lexeme 'love'—is one of the nine essences or emotions (*nava rasas*) of classical Indian aesthetic theory, exemplified in dance, poetry, theatre, painting and *cinema*, and composed of love-in-union and love-in-separation (Schechner 2003: 333ff; Dwyer 2000:28ff). *Srngaram* as understood at the popular level is of necessity mostly focussed on love-in-separation. It is desire, unconsummated love, yearning; as such it must be experienced not, like

familial love (*sneham*), as fulfilled contentment, but as a tormented fusion of pleasure and pain. Countless south Asian movies trace the lineaments of this *love* experience.

In contemporary Kerala, as in most of south Asia outside urban sophisticated circles, *romance* only very occasionally leads to marriage (see Walle 2004, Abraham 2004, for discussions of how young people affirm and largely stay within the bounds of mainstream morality; see also Grover 2005 on the complex relation between primary marriages, secondary unions and love marriages). Indeed, the prototypical—hence, most romantic—*romance* is a doomed one. This means that cross-community *love*, where there is almost no chance of parental agreement to marriage, best expresses the ambivalent *srngaram* experience. The confusion engendered by this potent mixture of intense emotions is compounded by the intensification and reversal of hierarchies undertaken during the course of play. This confusion and ambiguity itself also plays a central role in the *srngaram* experience: as Trawick reminds us, love is something that reverses and undermines order, which repeatedly turns the world upside-down and spins it around (Trawick 1990: 111; 113ff).

Tuning and *romance* continue—sometimes for years—in eternal deferment and generally do not lead to consummation or marriage, apart from the extreme, asocial, negatively sanctioned cases: rape, consensual pre-marital sex, and love-marriage (whether by elopement or by agreement of the families concerned). These three possible resolutions are exceptional and rare[8]. Couples engaged in *romance* generally have no intention of going against parental wishes and trying to transform the relationship into something more permanent. While the lack of an impulse or drive towards closure gives a leisurely and expansive feel to the relationship, the air of tragedy and doom which the relationship's unsuitability create heighten the *srngaram* experience. One doomed couple we knew tormented and pleased themselves by giving names to all the children they would never have together.

Conclusions: From Romance to Kinship

The aggressive group sexuality of harassment, the risky play of flirting (*tuning*) and the adoption of a pose of sensitive/romantic hero: all these stake out arenas in which young men compete, are judged by their peers, and form themselves into hierarchies around masculine performance. As boys move out of single-sex masculine performance arenas and into the cross-sex world of flirting and *romance* proper, two aspects of *love* and indeed of

masculinity—assertive aggression and supplicant tenderness—mark boys as ambiguous creatures. Boys' masculine performances of harassment and romance place them at opposite ends of two different hierarchical dyads, with respect to girls: aggressive pursuer and supplicant admirer. Girls are equally ambivalent creatures: during *tuning* and making a *line*, they may relate in turn to a boy as superior, erotic mature woman or as inferior submissive younger sister, as complicit seducers or as hapless innocent victims[9]. As *romance* progresses, opposing roles and dyads fuse and collapse into each other; at this point hierarchies founded upon difference are reversed and undermined, finally revealed as arbitrary. The entire process of *tuning*, making and keeping *line*s, and doing *romance* is characterized throughout by values of indeterminacy: hesitancy, ambiguity and ambivalence. Dominance, control and relative status remain fluid, as power continually oscillates, and neither roles nor hierarchy can be fixed or maintained. Yet what remains constant is the excitation of heterosexual desire and the deepening investment of young people in heterosexual relations, figured as part of one's maturing gender status and as a means of attaining normatively gendered adulthood. For girls especially, becoming 'mother' and the dramatic rise in status this produces is eagerly anticipated; it goes without saying that parenthood is utterly predicated upon marriage and hence, heterosexual relationships.

Eventually, most young people abandon their *romance* (sometimes only after several years) and accede to dowried, arranged stranger marriage, in the interests of familial and personal reputation and social mobility. At that moment, the 'normal' rules of hierarchy common in mainstream society are re-asserted: family above person, elder people above younger but also—in the unspoken and naturalized doxic requirement of community endogamy—one's own community above others, and other communities above one's own, making exogamy practically unthinkable (Bourdieu 1990:68; Osella and Osella 2000a:98ff). Cross-community friendships, egalitarian sharing and distance-breaking physical contact all blossom on the street among young men; *tuning* and *romance* stake out other and more exciting arenas in which south Asian hierarchy can be 'played', transgressed and reversed, its arbitrariness revealed. Meanwhile, within the spheres of the home and family, conventional hierarchies of caste and gender are still widely strictly maintained. If, in Euro-American ideology, love and marriage go together like 'a horse and carriage', here they continue to be overwhelmingly produced, framed and experienced as utterly different realms[10]. Immature individualising *romance* gives way to mature duty and responsibility, enmeshed in concerns of the wider family. The hope that one

will 'fall in love' with one's spouse (more strongly expressed among girls) is a recent one, and not terribly well developed. Several young people told us privately that access to sex ('getting the *licence*') was what they were immediately looking forward to post-wedding. More generalized is the pride and pleasure that come from attainment of adult status with marriage and parenthood.

While Kerala retains a public face of extreme gender conservatism, discreet playfulness and flirtatiousness remain among standardized ways in which adult men and women can choose to relate to one another. Within the private spaces of the home, these moments often occur over food, which is usually prepared, cooked and served only by women, thus offering a legitimate moment of cross-sex interaction[11]. For a man to ask a woman for food or water and for her to serve him are acts resonant of love and nurturance, mastery and servitude, intimacy and sharing: such acts may be understood or resolved in the direction either of maternality or of eroticism, or may be—quite commonly—deliberately left ambiguous.

A younger brother calls to his elder brother's wife for more rice, and she meets his eyes challengingly and mischievously as she spoons out a huge portion. He meets her gaze, and asks, 'Isn't there anything more to go with it?' The remark, like the look that passes between them and the handling of the request for more rice, is subtly flirtatious[12]. A woman should stand to her husband's younger brother as a mother (for Hindus–*chettathiamma*). But sometimes, nearer to him than to her husband in age, in a relationship unbound by formality, perhaps in the absence of a migrant husband, she becomes his mistress. If the relationship stays (as it usually does) within conventional confines, it remains characterized by flirting, with features of deferred or deflected desire. Flirting and double-meaning talk is very common and a lasting pleasure, well beyond the youthful period; it is the semi-public open secret that enlivens much of social interaction and acts as a foil to the official 'traffic in women' and to gender/sexual conservatism.

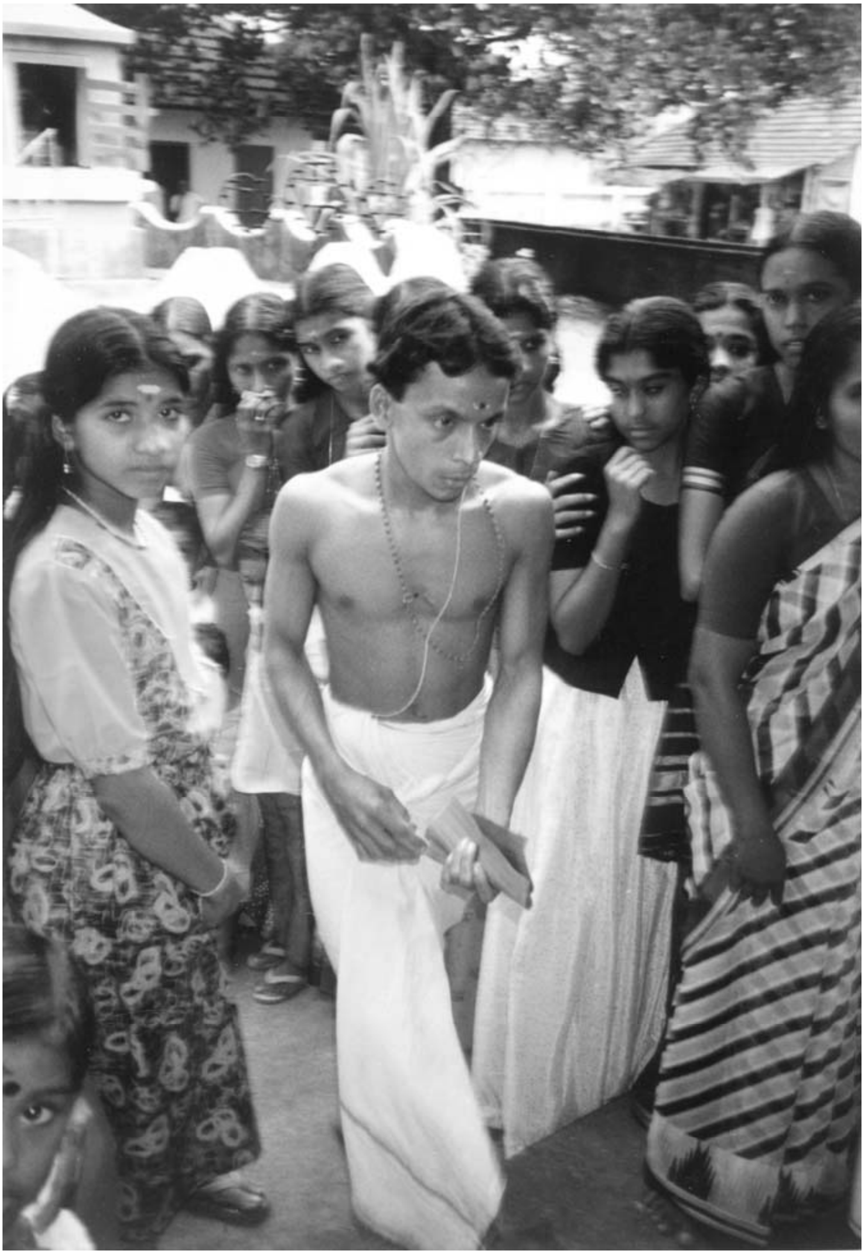
'Sexuality' cannot be limited to genital activity, but has to be thought of as part of a wider social complex of making heterosexuality and preparing people for arranged marriage, parenthood, householder responsibilities, kinship obligations. As such, the fantasies of women's magazines, movies and TV serials, the cultivation of flirting relationships, the enjoyment of smutty humour and double-meanings, the abjection of overt homosexual activities or identities, all play a part in helping to produce heterosexual adults who will willingly take their place in society. But in contrast to US/European situations, heterosexual hegemony in Kerala, as across south Asia, exists within a situation of gender segregation and alongside strong

structures of homosociality. Nevertheless young men and women have almost no latitude to 'opt out' of marriage, parenthood and the heterosexual nuclear household; heterosexuality is produced and cultivated as part of a set of structures that are also deeply implicated in the production of normative gender positions.

Notes

1. In India, among Hindus, marriage is explicitly named as a gift from one man to another: *kanyadan*, the Hindu term for marriage, literally means the gift of a virgin. For a Hindu father, religious merit is received when he gifts his virgin daughter to another man in marriage. In south Asian Muslim marriages, a man stands for himself at the moment of making the contract, the *nikkah*; but a woman is spoken for by the *wali*, a senior man who decides what is best for her. Usually, this will be her father. It is the *wali*, not the bride, who holds the groom's hand and makes the marriage contract; an agreement between two men. Among Indian Christians, a bride is taken to the church altar by her father, who is said to 'give her away' to the man who will become her husband.
2. Unmarried men may be *payyan* or *cherukkan*, both terms carrying intimations of the diminutive; young women are *pennu*—female—or *pennkutti*—girl-child. Married adults carry the status of *purusan* and *stri*—man and woman.
3. Rubin has continued to develop her thought and changed her position several times over her career, compare e.g. Rubin 1984.
4. *Half-sari*: young woman's dress of a full, gathered skirt (*pavada*) worn with a long blouse and a piece of material tied, cross-wise across the breasts to bind them. Gradually replaced in Kerala, since the 1980s, by the "*churidar*", (actually, the north-Indian style *salwaar kameez*), a long loose tunic with baggy trousers, worn with a *shawl*, a long scarf worn over the shoulder or across the breasts.
5. Recently the south Indian film actress Khushboo caused outrage and was subject to severe backlash when she suggested that Indian men need not insist upon their wives being virgins at marriage. See Anandhi 2005 for a discussion of the controversy.
6. A lifelong process into which they are of course born and which intensifies at adolescence.
7. Cf. Heald 1990:383 on the 'possibility of playing it for real', and Simmel 1984:135/6 on '...the unwillingness to submit oneself that could be an indirect way to self-surrender', and 1984:138, 'One of the most typical cases of the practice of the flirt lies in the domain of *intellectual* (emphasis in original) self concealment: the assertion of something that is not really meant'.
8. Cf. Simmel 1984: 147, 'Flirtation …is play because it does not take anything seriously ... it plays off all oppositions against one another and …relieves the relationship …from every burden of decision'.
9. Initial love-letters from girls to boys frequently begin, 'my dearest respected elder brother'.
10. Of course, 'love marriage' exists and may even be on the rise among certain sections of metropolitan middle-classes, but it remains a minority practice out of the question for most (see e.g. Donner 2002; Grover 2005: 83ff).

11. This statement does not apply so well among Muslim communities. Most Muslims maintain much stricter segregation and we notice quite different gendered dynamics, which we will be exploring elsewhere (forthcoming).
12. The exchange passed above is a more subtle version of the blatant ‘how much and how big?’ flirt described in Yelvington (1996:324): in both cases, the pair play with ideas about masculine strength and size, about sexual appetite, and about female knowingness and experience; in the Indian case, sex has been coded into food, preserving ambiguity and open-ness.



A young brahmin doing daily puja (chapter 2)



A young brahmin carrying the godess during a temple festival (chapter 2)



A householder-landowner supervises his worker-dependents in his paddy fields (chapters 3 and 4)



Gulf migrant returning (chapter 3).

A young man's marriage (chapter 6).





Tamil swamis at Sabarimala (chapter 7).



A man takes his son as kanniswami to Sabarimala (chapter 7).



Young men playing kabbadi (chapter 8).

CHAPTER 6

Negotiating Heterosexuality: Pornography, Masturbation and 'Secret Love'

Adult Heterosexuality

In the previous chapter, we have seen that before marriage most young people limit themselves to *tuning* and *romance*. Before moving on to think about the next stage, that of adult heterosexuality, we need to take a detour into a very specifically south Asian set of issues. Here, we begin with the fact that there is a large body of literature in anthropology and psychology referring to 'semen-loss anxiety', a generalized anxiety commonly found among south Asian men and focused around the deleterious effects to health of losing semen, a substance which, when conserved, contributes to physical well-being and strength. This anxiety has been widely taken (by psychology and anthropology alike) as a coded way of speaking about sexual anxieties, and as the central plank of evidence of a pathological fear among south Asian men of mature women and of male reluctance towards sexual activity. We have shown elsewhere at length that 'semen loss anxiety' is not necessarily related to sexuality. We also show that it needs to be, as it has not been, clearly differentiated from a separate anxiety, which specifically does refers to sexual performance—'first night' apprehensions—young men's anxieties about the wedding night. At the same time, cultural discourses that warn against sexual outlets must be set against those discourses that seek or approve sexual activity, and against the actual practices of young men and women, which often do not coincide with 'official versions' counselling and lauding total continence and virginity till marriage.

At first glance, our own material follows the classic pattern found in

other published accounts concerning men's high evaluation of semen and an accompanying semen-loss anxiety. Our findings hardly vary from those set out in Morris Carstairs' (1957:83ff, 196, 322) classic culture and personality study, published over 40 years ago. Carstairs reports that, 'Everyone knew that semen was not easily formed; it takes 40 days, and 40 drops of blood, to make one drop of semen', (1957:83ff), and, 'What was much more striking…was the preoccupation which many seemingly healthy men showed with real or imagined spermatorrhoea', (1957:85). He comments that, 'In Western medical practice this condition is a rarity…a common presenting syndrome in a psychiatrist's…clinic…this anxiety is shown by a few neurotic individuals, burdened with the disproportionate guilt of an unresolved Oedipus complex' (1957:85). Carstairs prudently skipped over drawing the problematic conclusion (or asking the question of whether it is possible or likely) that an entire male population (or at least 70 per cent of it) suffers from neurosis rooted in an unresolved oedipal complex: later analysts have not, we will see, been so prudent. Instead, Carstairs offers us a 'less deep' (in psychological terms) explanation, drawn from respondents' articulations of conflict around sexual expression and the difficulties of knowing precisely how much is too much. Carstairs concludes that the cultural 'rules' regulating sexual behaviour are uncompromisingly over-strict, so that incontinence is inevitably bound to follow, with resulting guilt (1957:87). The 70 per cent who suffer from semen-loss anxiety are saved from charges of oedipal immaturity, but still labelled as suffering from anxiety neurosis. The roots of this process of pathologisation lie in Carstairs' evaluation of 'the rules' as over-strict: a normative assumption is being made here about the degree of sexual activity 'naturally' desired by men. In line with his Freudian line of thinking, Carstairs assumes sexuality to be a natural drive, demanding expression.

Foucault's work on sexuality makes clear to us the inaccuracy of the folk perception, common until fairly recently and even in academic circles up until Foucault, that sex was a repressed and covert aspect of European life until—depending on where you put the time line—the advent of Freudian theory or the arrival of the permissive 1960s. As Foucault has adequately demonstrated to us, and as a host of empirical studies have since explored, actually the so-called repressive Victorian era, for example, saw an outpouring of discourse on sex and the production of 'sexuality' as an important component of the self (e.g. Foucault 1984, 1987, 1988). Sexuality—as a realm of life, a matter for policy, a topic of scientific interest, a set of identities, an entity—was produced with modernity[1]. Freudian theory was then part of this development of 'sexuality' and was responsible

for shaping several of our modern myths of sexuality. Margaret Jackson (1987) draws out of a longitudinal study of sexological work some of these basic core myths (e.g. the need for sex is like the need for food, and it is dangerous to be sex-starved). Many of these modern myths do seem to be repeated in much of the analysis of south Asian sexuality as necessarily tormented and repressed, over-regulated. We also need to ask whether 'the rules' as publicly stated across South Asia are actually followed.

Writing 20 years later, Veena Das starts from the position that a Hindu man, '(f)aces a peculiar contradiction, whereby abstaining from sex is considered to bestow great power and health and yet satisfaction of instinctual urges is also considered necessary' (1979:99). She considers that this ambivalent message about sexuality which is passed on to young men is rooted in the Hindu ascetic: erotic contradiction, an opposition which we will pick up and discuss at length in the next chapter. In this case, normative judgements on the central question of, 'how much sex is too much?' are avoided; a psychological tension within the person is seen to be a straightforward manifestation of a wider cultural tension, the original source of which is explicitly located within Hindu texts.

Textual scholars of Hinduism switch focus from the sufferer's dilemma to the substance itself, linking semen to other highly valued moist, cool white fluids. They analyse the structural relations between various bodily fluids (blood, milk) and between bodily substances and their cosmic counterparts (fire, rain), linking the two by means of the familiar Indian micro- macro-cosmic equivalence (e.g. see Shulman 1980:93ff; O'Flaherty 1980:17ff). This approach allows us to appreciate the symbolic importance of semen and to understand its centrality as a precious, sacred fluid, which should be conserved and not wasted (see e.g. Zimmermann 1987:222; cf. Bottero 1991 for confirmation that such evaluations of semen are not limited to South Asia) but it fails to address the other side of the dilemma, which is the necessity for regular release. Research on male sexual practices across South Asia has suggested the importance of hydraulic or thermostatic folk models of sexuality, which insist upon regular release or 'discharge' (e.g. Seabrook 1999; Khan 1996, 1997). Sanjay Srivastava's recent work addresses exactly the search for 'release' and tracks 'subaltern sexualities' (Srivastava 2004a, 2004b). Srivastava makes it clear that discourses of containment are located in certain social arenas only. Among the urban working class and aspiring lower-middle class people he works with, sex is frankly spoken of in certain arenas; people wish for and try to craft active and satisfying sex lives; people have sex in a variety of ways—far, far beyond the reproductive paradigm; and sexuality takes on some of the work of producing an inner self.

Srivastava suggests that in contemporary urban India at least, sexuality is popularly understood as a means of self-expression and self-making, and as a legitimate pleasure. In rural Kerala, we also find that ideas about sex as an enjoyable, necessary and legitimate (albeit discreet) activity are widespread.

Returning to semen loss and turning next to the work of Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar, we come full circle from south Asian studies' Indological moment, with the focus shifted away from textual or religious meanings of semen and back onto the person, and specifically onto his anxiety. Kakar, for whom sexuality must be semen's main referent, pursues a psychoanalytic interpretation which Carstairs had backed away from: 'mature women are sexually threatening to men, which contributes to avoidance behaviour in sexual relations, which in turn causes women to extend a provocative sexual presence towards their sons, which eventually produces adult men who fear the sexuality of mature women' (Kakar 1982:95; cf. Kakar 1989:133ff; see Dwyer 2000:133ff for a discussion of and a different reading of powerful female/goddess figures in film). Here, beliefs in the danger to health from semen-loss act as an ideological prop—serving husbands' avoidance of sexual relations with their wives, and as the actual, neurotic, expression of Hindu males' 'latent sexual dread of the mature female' (1982:94); '(w)e must conclude that the sexual presence of the "bad mother" looms large in the unconscious experience of male children in India'(1982:95).

Kakar's approach to Indian male sexuality had already been anticipated for the Kerala ethnography by Kathleen Gough, in her Freudian interpretation of matrilineal female initiation rites (1955). Gough connects men's ambivalence around female sexuality, particularly their reluctance to deflower virgins, with the associations commonly made between virgins and the fierce Hindu goddess Bhadrakali, pre-eminent deity in Kerala. The goddess herself, as might be expected, is taken to be a projection of a male fantasy figure—the bloody, phallic, sexually demanding, castrating mother. Alan Roland (1988) and Stanley Kurtz (1992) are both trained psychoanalysts who have more lately attempted to systematize a specifically Indian (Hindu) developmental path and adult psyche, while simultaneously trying to use their clinical data to expunge ethnocentrism from general psychoanalytic theory. These two analysts go far, both in outlining significant differences between Euro-American and Asian family styles and developmental schemas, and in indicating the areas in which and degree to which psychoanalytic theory is culture-bound[2]. In the last instance, however, the by-now familiar bogey-figure, that of the powerful, sensual woman (for which, in a psychoanalytic context, we unavoidably read 'too

powerful', 'inappropriately sensual'), makes her appearance (read through the Hindu fierce goddess) in both accounts, whether singly or as a truly awesome multiple.

Sarah Caldwell is the latest ethnographer to fall prey to the lures of over-analysis and to the heavy-handed use of psychoanalytic theory. Her discussion of Malayali male sexuality is by far the most vicious and damaging depiction of south Asian masculinity to date. In vivid detail, she documents her increasingly bad relationship in the field with her husband Antonio, her growing passion for Abhilash (a Malayali field assistant) and her infatuation with Hinduism, and particularly with the fierce goddess, Bhadrakali, Kerala's most popular deity.

> 'This is the goddess manifest inside of me… that mothering instinct to press his [Abhilash] dear black-haired head softly against my naked breast… Is this where my long-lost spiritual quest has led me? I give myself to him over and over again' (Caldwell 1999:269).

Leaving aside all the other odd notes in Caldwell's account (of which there are many, possibly due to her frankly expressed alienation from Kerala's conservativism), we focus here on her rather extraordinary claim that Kerala menfolk are not only—as we by now wearily expect—unable to enjoy mature heterosexual relations, but that the roots of this can be traced to a widespread culture in Kerala of incest, child abuse and an interest in fellatio, which renders the Kerala man utterly pathologized.

> 'Male feminine identification focuses on the oral potentiality and threat of the entire feminine body, converting the breasts and vagina into phallic, self-feeding organs in a homosexual fantasy of fellatio which eliminates females from the loop of sexuality entirely while co-opting the oral/sexual pleasures their bodies provide." (Caldwell 1999:190).

This is placed within a posited masculine masochistic frame, which is also claimed as pathological, rather than a possible source of private gender/sexual play or mitigation of masculine dominance in other arenas (Caldwell 1999:172).

As with other Freudian readings, pathology here is almost assured, since any pattern of romantic/sexual/family life which does not conform to a narrow Euro–American norm is bound to be read as unhealthy. Moreover, the Freudian view of sexuality as a drive demanding expression necessarily leads to negative evaluation of any social practices which do

not appear to be recognising and permitting 'expression' of that 'drive'. Caldwell also holds fast to unproblematized assumptions of a naturalized heterosexuality: 'The comments reveal… the "almost pathologically excessive restrictions on [adolescent] libidinal life" (Masson 1976:624) forced on young people in Kerala which perhaps encourage homosexual contacts in lieu of access to heterosexual ones' (Caldwell 1999:182).

Summarising, from the 1950s to the 1990s, semen-loss anxiety has been lumped in together with 'potency anxiety', 'fear of virginity', 'ambivalence towards female sexuality' and so on, the whole to be considered as one complex: male sexual anxiety indicative of pathological psychic conflict. In social-structural and cultural analyses, anxiety is attributed to the impossibility for men of correctly socially regulating their sexual impulses, seen as individualized and necessarily wayward. In psychoanalytically motivated analyses, the roots of the posited sexual anxiety are traced to fears of demanding, devouring mature female sexuality[3], the latter hypothesized in over-intense mother-son attachments leading to ambivalence. A range of pathologies have been commonly attributed to south Asian men, the whole then put together to form a generalized 'syndrome', effectively defaming an entire population.

We now know much about processes by which gender and Orientalist hierarchies intersect, such that 'unmanliness' has been commonly attributed to 'Asians' (e.g. Nandy 1983; Kanitkar 1994; Sinha 1995; Pandian 1995; McClintock 1995; Luhrmann 1996; cf. Back 1994). We propose then that all analyses which result in making hierarchies of masculinity and sexuality, with males of European origins at the top and south Asians—caricatured as effeminate mother's boys terrified of women and of sex—at the bottom, be treated with the utmost suspicion. While Carstairs and Gough are clearly analyses of their time, and Kakar is pre-determined by the disciplinary framework within which he works (and, perhaps, his own subject position as sophisticated urbanite intellectual critical of his own society), Caldwell—a female anthropologist writing in the 1990s—is different. We are dismayed to find in a contemporary ethnography the reinscription (and in such a vilificatory and vicious manner) of Orientalist readings of Asian masculinity.

Sanjay Srivastava has recently prompted us to think critically in general about the over-historicism of south Asian studies. He takes specific issue with culturalist 'deep structure' arguments, which are commonly—practically automatically and unreflexively—brought to bear on south Asian material (Srivastava 2004a 175ff; Srivastava 2004b:16). Srivastava in his latest work—on the 'Education of the Passions' in India—urges us to focus on the many and more relevant current forces working to structure action: might a

vernacular women's magazine be more influential than the Laws of Manu in shaping contemporary Indian sexual attitudes and practices? We are convinced by Srivastava's argument that, at least for the vast non-elite majority sections of the Indian population, this is indeed the case (Srivastava in press). The analyses we have considered so far all suffer from a pre-Foucauldian understanding of sexuality as a 'drive' demanding expression, from a tendency to make gross generalisations about 'south Asian culture' from Indological and historiological tendencies, and from an utter refusal to locate discourses and anxieties about continence. When we look, for example, at Joseph Alter's study of 'Gandhi's Body' (2000), we find that the preoccupation with semen is not necessarily a generalized 'south Asian' phenomenon, but is something which particular people may be invested in at certain moments: a concern with celibacy, containment and the imagined accumulation of resources—a bodily economy—has a social location. Alter clearly delineates how Gandhi's peculiar biography and his web of influences and contacts—from German friction bath and raw food enthusiasts to New York naturopaths—make him especially concerned with bodily inputs and outputs generally, from foodstuffs and enemas to emissions of semen. While 'Gandhianism' might have exerted influence on a certain class of a certain generation of men, this would be both a circumscribed group and one would not expect 'Gandhianists' to take their bodily disciplines as seriously—we might say compulsive-obsessively—as their master. Alter's work on wrestlers also makes it clear that men engaged in wrestling are anxious to consume semen-increasing foods and avoid depletion of semen, which would mean a depletion of bodily strength and hence wrestling prowess–a masculine skill (Alter 1992; cf. Lucia Michelutti forthcoming). But the pursuit of accumulated super-strength, muscular wrestler-style masculinity or spiritual virtuosity through renunciation are not, we must remember, the goals of most menfolk. Srivastava traces both the class fractures within sexuality, and a historical shift. He offers us an interesting contrast in masculine types: the early post-independence nationalist 'five year plan hero', a man concerned with nation-building, accumulation and strongly under the influence of Gandhi (Srivastava 1998). He embodies a rather different modal masculinity from most contemporary menfolk, who are engaged in working, earning and enjoying—albeit in limited ways—India's expanding consumer cultures (Srivastava 2004a).

While we can recognize among the older generation (60+) of men in Kerala a few 'five year plan' oriented types, the vast majority resemble more closely Srivastava's contemporary man, for whom working, earning and spending are major preoccupations. The material we have from Kerala is

less deep than Srivastava's, given the generalized focus of our fieldwork, in which 'sexuality' is only something we pick up on as part of a wide range of other aspects of life (e.g. paddy agriculture, caste mobility, consumption); but we feel that it is as reasonable a base for making arguments from as is the material offered by Caldwell, which carries a haphazard and anecdotal feel and has almost nothing to say either about womenfolk and what they have to say or about the intimacies of daily life and the practices of actual heterosexual relationships. Much of her material is attributed to the unnamed and unaccounted 'a young man'/'another young man' (e.g. 1999:182). Many of the titbits she offers appear to us not as mainstream talk of the sort we are used to hearing about sex (and always anyway in situations of gender segregation) but as the sort of excessive anecdotes which Malayali young men might relish recounting to a woman who reveals herself willing to engage in un-chaperoned cross-sex interaction and in frank talk about sex (something which, as Caldwell's husband gloomily—and correctly—intuited, is not at all appropriate in Kerala, as in wider South Asia, but which she persisted in doing anyway, professing bewilderment when eventually she had to 'accept everyone's scorn', 1999:181, 218).

Gay writer Jeremy Seabrook, who met regularly with men in a Delhi cruising ground, gives a more nuanced picture of Indian men and a more complex set of issues. While non-academic in style, Seabrook's interview-based account gives us a deeply complex picture of rural sexualities. Incestuous and inter-generational sexual contacts exist, but are not a generalized baseline of most men's sexual experience; such encounters are also highly variable in their effects and evaluations, sometimes recounted as abuse, sometimes remembered with pleasure or even continued into adulthood (Seabrook 1999:119ff). Seabrook finds that even men who claim to be utterly uninterested in sex with women and committed to lifelong casual 'male-to-male' sexual relations often express love or sympathy towards—or even enjoyment—in their wives' company (Seabrook 1999:18ff). Paul Boyce, who has worked among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Calcutta (in press), also finds many men happily engaged in sexual relationships with both men and women alike. A liking for homosexual activities implies neither hostility towards women nor even avoidance of or lack of enjoyment in sex with them. Empirical studies like these latter two are beginning to point us towards a far more complex analysis of south Asian sexual behaviours.

The picture Caldwell draws of Kerala sexuality, masculinity and gender relations seems to us, when we compare with the Kerala we know or with the comparative material given by Seabrook and Boyce, to be utterly one-

sided and over-stated—a 'Western woman's' disappointment with south Asian gender conservatism and an unwillingness to inhabit the anthropologists' empathetic or relativist position. Caldwell offers us a deeply hostile and alienated take on Kerala life, as when she remarks that pre-reform marriage practices might be seen as 'child abuse', a practise which, she asserts, continues wholesale in contemporary Kerala (1999:220ff). Seabrook, who also worries about what he sees as the exploitative and inappropriate nature of some of the experiences recounted to him, still manages to write with empathy towards Indian society and is reflexively aware of the pitfalls of bringing value judgements into assessment of others' sexual behaviours (1999:178). By contrast, Caldwell's impatience with Kerala's conservatism and her distance from Malayali womenfolk appear as unmitigated. When she spends two weeks in a Malayali village home, it prompts her to write:

> 'This is the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life. My behaviour is never right. I am experiencing frustration and anger and depression of being so restricted all the time… There was big gossip just because I came off the bus with Rajiv, the unmarried young man who lives here.' (Caldwell 1999:201).

That two weeks of life making partial surrender to local expectations of behaviour was experienced as an unbearable imposition suggests a complete unwillingness to make the empathetic identifications which would have moved her closer towards Malayali women and towards more nuanced representation[4].

Her analysis reaches bathos when she finally asserts:

> 'Incestuous child abuse in Kerala, then, may result, as in much of South Asia, from cultural conditions valuing strong restrictions on sexual behaviour, combined with very intimate and affectively charged family relations, close living conditions, shared sleeping arrangements, and a tropical climate where minimal clothing is the norm [sic]' (Caldwell 1999:224).

We quote this passage at length because it seems hardly possible that it has been published in 1999 ('tropical climate…minimal clothing'), but sounds more like some 19th century missionary jibe[5].

Masturbation: A Young Man's Game

In contrast to Caldwell's picture of miserable, repressed and pathological

sexuality, we find a continuity between flirting, romance and sexuality: officially taboo; unofficially and semi-clandestinely widely practised; spoken about among intimates with much joking and sense of fun and enjoyment; ambivalent in the gendered power relations it evokes; and generally resolutely oriented towards heterosexuality. Here, the material we have on men comes from Filippo's conversations and experiences, while Caroline 'rounds out' this material from the perspective of stories and jokes told in the women's rooms. Young men (*payyanmar)* talk, joke about, and practise masturbation. The 'culture of masturbation' includes sharing of magazines and videos, a repertoire of myths and jokes and a specialized 'code' vocabulary to fox outsiders, such as the term *self-help club* to refer to group or mutual masturbation, or *scene catching* to the activity of looking for and secretly observing scenes such as women bathing or married couples engaged in sexual activity. Advice given by doctors and in popular magazines urges young men not to resist the desire to masturbate, but to act upon it, in moderation. Like women, who are commonly depicted as prone to bodily 'heat', men too can 'over-heat' and, as a result, can suffer health problems and constitute a social danger. Anthropological literature is full of discussions about discourses that link female heatedness and sexuality, and tends to give the impression that fierce sexual desire and bodily heat is an entirely female attribute (see e.g. Tapper 1979:7; Babb 1970:146; Fuller 1980:333-9). We have found that desire and heat are especially associated with a series of social categories (including the young of both sexes and those with 'heating' jobs, such as lorry drivers). This broader spread of heatedness, which also applies to menfolk, fits in with what is reported by those working across South Asia in HIV and AIDS prevention oriented research (Osella and Osella 1996:50; Khan 1997; Khan and Khilji 2002). When men reach their late 20s or early 30s without being married (recently, relatively common because of Gulf migration), they are said to be 'desperate' for a woman, and dangerously over-heated. These unmarried men can constitute a direct danger to the community, as they might start illicit sexual relations with married women (brother's wives in most common cases). Young men are advised not to endanger both health and social morality by resisting sexual desire, but to find an appropriate outlet for it whenever it arises. Masturbation, while part of public discourse only in the medical realm, is tacitly accepted as a necessary part of a young unmarried man's life.

Magazines passed around among young men as masturbation aids include both soft pornography and ostensibly 'medical' or 'psychological' publications such as *Doctor's Answers*. While video shops rent out *blue movies*, these are not easy for most young men to watch: even in those households

with a VCR/DVD player, young men find it difficult to get private access to it; such movies are watched more by older men and by young married couples than by unmarried men. Kerala is famed—notorious—within India for its pornography industry, something which those who were willing to discuss it with us usually chose to displace, attributing it to the distorting influence of 'Gulf culture' (practices said to have been brought into Kerala by Gulf migrants, who spend long periods working away from their wives and families). Those young men who have satellite or cable TV at home may manage sometimes to stay up and watch an X-rated Hollywood movie, while other family members are in bed[6]. For the most part though, illicit viewing takes place outside the home, in *cinema* theatres.

At midday, *cinema* theatres are packed with boys skipping school or college in order to see the specially made pornographic inserts, which are slipped into some feature films at the noon show only (cf. Seabrook 1999). We have been unable to go and see any of these for ourselves (our presence would cause scandal and ruin fieldwork), but Filippo was told that they contain kissing, semi-nudity and non-explicit rape or lovemaking scenes. The cheaply printed pornographic magazines that were passed around between boys at the time of our 1980s–1990s fieldwork (and which we have seen) feature black and white photographs of Indian women in lingerie, colour photographs of European women naked[7] and 'readers' letters', which, purporting to be reports of true experiences, are grounded in quasi-realistic scenarios. They are mostly variations on the theme of 'let me tell you about my wedding night', but may include such items as, 'how to get a girl of twelve to yield to you'. They are a variety of what Srivastava discusses as 'footpath literature' (Srivastava 2004a: 357ff).

The photographs and narratives play with two basic sexual fantasies that centre around the surrender and assertion of power, respectively, that of the older or experienced woman who seduces and that of the reluctant young girl/virgin who is violated or persuaded. Magazine photographs serve both fantasies. The European women, naked and looking directly at the camera, are unequivocally sophisticated seducers; the Indian women may, by simple virtue of their presence, be presumed to be willing and experienced *cheetha pennungal* (bad girls/bad women). On the other hand, unlike their European counterparts, they generally remain partially clothed (in underwear) and coy, and the gazer is thus free to decide that they are innocent victims, 'surprised' in the bathroom or bedroom while dressing. Sometimes this effect is actively suggested, as they pose brushing their hair, or admiring themselves in the mirror.

The use of pornography, while widespread, is not without its dangers.

The basic outline of one story/contemporary myth, which we heard several times in various versions and locations runs as follows:–

> A Gulf migrant has an unmarried younger sister. He works away for 10 years, suffering on a building site and scrimping and saving to muster enough cash for his sister's dowry, before finally coming home on leave to arrange her marriage. After fixing the perfect alliance and spending lakhs of rupees on a lavish reception, the final sophisticated (and ruinously expensive) touch is when he arranges for the happy couple to spend their first night away in a hotel. Satisfied, he returns to the Gulf. His friends, happy to see him return, suggest an evening's celebration: a few bottles of whisky and a couple of *blue movies*. As the second movie begins to roll—a 'candid camera' scene of a pair of lovers, shot with a secret lens—he realizes to his horror that the woman in the film is his sister.

In some versions of this story, she has been caught in her honeymoon hotel with her new husband, enthusiastically enjoying her first night; in others, she is engaged in a pre-marital illicit affair. This story, it seems to us, suggests an anxiety not about sex per se, but about the south Asian double standard, which implicitly condones male sexual activity while seeking female chastity and reluctance. The double standard is one of the factors that encourages young men to displace sexual desire onto foreign women who can, by their dress and demeanour, be seen as legitimate targets (*cheetha pennungal*, bad women) and who are, since the advent of satellite and cable, increasingly constructed as desire-objects. As one young man remarked, '"Bay-Watch" must be a programme especially made for us *payyanmar!*'

Pleasure-seeking is not confined to fantasy representations of women, but seeks out the real thing. Those young men who have the financial resources arrange day-trips to places such as Kovalam and Varkala: these are beach resorts frequented by 'travellers' and by tourists, both foreign and north Indian middle-class urbanites[8]. Other young men take advantage of college study-tour itineraries to visit these and similar tourist areas. The main foreign tourist season, around Christmas, coincides conveniently with the season of south India's men-only pilgrimage to Sabarimala (see Chapter 7). Those *payyanmar* with the cash to do so double their 'pilgrimages', visiting Sabarimala with their male elders and a beach resort in a separate trip, with their own gangs[9]. Young men can escape the gaze of disapproving elders and neighbours and the strictures of village life at these resorts: an ambience of licence, hedonism and squalor prevails; beer and marijuana are (not very

discreetly) on sale; but most importantly, scantily-dressed tourist women[10] wander around and can be leered at and even, for the daring, *jackied* (explained later) freely (Liechty 1995 for ethnography of a similar Nepali tourist spot; Rogers 2005: 164ff on Chennai male college students' tales of visits to sex workers in Goa). Sexual assault or even occasional rapes by day-tripping boys are sometimes reported, with subsequent debates in the local press about who is to blame (cf. Segal 1990:234ff). From the young men's point of view, an explicit intention of these pleasure-trips is to provide sexual gratification. 'You get so tired after going to Kovalam and seeing the girls!', one boy winkingly remarked to Filippo, referring to the hectic masturbation which follows this feast of sight-seeing and *jackie*. *Jackie*, like *scene-catching*, is a sort of young man's sport, which can be played alone or in groups with others: its main aim is to get an erection, 'like a car jack', and somehow manoeuvre in order to rub it against a girl or woman. This is easily done in crowded situations, such as on buses or at temple and church festivals and is, reputedly, not always resisted. Young men have a rich lore of *jackie* stories, such as the one about the boy who found a willing partner on a long-distance bus going to Thiruvananthapuram and eventually ended up in Kanyakumari—150 km away!

Beyond Official Versions

That *jackie* may not always be unwelcome, and that girls may also sometimes manipulate the anonymity and ambiguity offered by situations of public crowds, leads us back to the question of cross-sex relationships. We have already discussed the trajectory from passing remarks and first looks (*tuning*) through aggressive flirting and on to full-blown *romance*. These relationships are forbidden and must remain hidden, or at least discreet, from elders. *Line*s can be more or less complex: a Christmas card sent from a girl to a male college-mate with the friendly greeting, 'Dear Elder Brother, how are you and all your family? I do hope that you are well', provoked the comment, '*a simple line*', with the implication that it was most likely to stay at this level (cf. Ahearn 2001). More complicated relationships offer greater promise.

Regular conversations and correspondence may sometimes lead to *romance*, involving pre-arranged secret meetings: trips to the *cinema*, snacks in restaurants or ice-cream parlours, or walks in wooded or parkland areas. Paradoxically, one of the safest places for girls to carry on secret liaisons is in their own house. After dusk, few people leave their houses; at this time, young men can move around the village relatively unobserved. Girls can come, at pre-arranged times or in response to secret signals, to the edge of

the house compound wall or gate while other family members, busy inside the house, presume the girl to be in the bathroom or bedroom. Her *lover* can sneak quietly to the wall or gate, where the pair can exchange forbidden love-letters and some private talk, and perhaps hold hands. The boldest young men jump the compound wall, to permit a few furtive embraces under cover of darkness: when there are power cuts, visits can be timed to coincide with this period of extra safety. As with *tuning*, girls maintain the limits on interaction, and most stop at kissing or light petting. Girls whose parents are working away in the Gulf or north India and who have been left at home under the inattentive eyes of elderly relatives are especially sought-after as *lover*s. Those who are surrounded by a watchful family still manage occasional meetings, for example, if parents are called out to attend a funeral or wedding function.

Sometimes, however, relationships develop further. While pre-marital sex remains rare for girls, it occasionally happens. Pregnancies and clandestine terminations often result, as young people have little knowledge of or access to contraception. But most commonly, young men's early heterosexual partners are older, married women: sisters-in-law or divorced or widowed women. While gossip about these liaisons abounds, such that they seem rarely to remain truly secret, they are tolerated so long as they remain discreet and unproven.

We arrived unexpectedly one early afternoon to visit Reminiamma, a 50-year-old widow. Her front door was closed, but neighbours told us, 'Call her; she's at home'. She opened the door with a flushed face, ushered us into the front room and sat on the doorstep to talk to us, cracking and chewing betel nut. After five minutes, a sulking young man in his twenties emerged from the back room, gave a surly nod to us, and passed across the threshold to stand just outside the front door. He muttered something *sotto voce* to Remini, who quietly replied. As he went to salute her and us and made to leave, Remini calmly reached down from the step to hand him some chewing tobacco and betel nut rolled in an areca leaf. As he popped it in his mouth and slunk away, we remembered the Malayalam proverb, 'Rice from the hand of the mother, betel from the hand of the wife'. The situation was apparently more embarrassing for Remini's visitor than for her, an interpretation supported by another, less discreet, case.

We were shocked and upset, in 1995, to receive a letter from the village reporting that one of our close neighbours, Balan, a young man in his early 20s, had committed suicide. No motive or explanation was given by the letter-writer, a young woman whose brother was among Balan's circle of friends. When we returned in 1996, Filippo, who had been on good terms

with Balan and his group, asked about the tragic death. He was told that Balan had been having a secret affair with another of our neighbours, Ponamma, a married woman in her 40s well-known for having had extra-marital affairs in the past. After discovery of one such affair, in 1993, she and her family had moved away to stay with relatives in the city for one year until gossip died down. It appeared that on their return, Ponamma had immediately taken up with Balan. The affair had remained secret for several months, but when the pair had been discovered, it was Balan whose shame was greater, to the extent of being unbearable: he had hanged himself. Caldwell discusses such cases in terms of abuse of young men by older women (even as she also argues for a 'patriarchal' and 'hypermasculine' society in which men always hold the upper hand and women have no agency). We prefer a more prosaic interpretation, which is the common south Asian understanding that one has a right to a secret life, but that it should remain secret and appearances should be stringently upheld (Seabrook 1999:127)[11]. Activists and researchers working across South Asia on HIV prevention report over and over that a public picture of pre-marital virginity and post-marital chastity is maintained and is a matter of deep investment, even as the spread of HIV and a scratch under the respectable surface reveals various forms of sexual activity not sanctioned by conventional morality (e.g. Seabrook 1999; Khan 1996; Agha 2002; Chakrapani 2000). Thomas Walle delicately traces the agonies for young Pakistani men of negotiating such a system, in which public reputation is of deathly importance and often at odds with actual practice (Walle 2004).

Illicit liaisons more commonly occur within the family circle, where there is not only greater opportunity to be alone but also far less chance of discovery by outsiders and of resulting public scandal and shame. Again, Caldwell claims widespread child abuse, while we notice that at least as many illicit sexual relations appear to take place between consenting same-age relatives. It is our experience that family elders may even tolerate and pretend ignorance of love affairs, viewed as harmless so long as they stay hidden within the family and do not lead to serious emotional entanglement. One night, when Filippo was called away, he took Caroline to a neighbour's house to sleep[12]. The man of the house emerged from the bedroom he shares with his eldest son, pulling on a shirt and getting ready to accompany Filippo; his wife, coming from the second bedroom where she slept with her eldest daughter and the baby, ushered Caroline into the darkened third bedroom where the teenagers were sleeping. As Caroline crept into the bed shared by the two girls, she was surprised to see another female form in the bed of Binu, the 16-year-old youngest son. Shiny, Binu's 14-year-old cousin

(MZDD), was sleeping not with her female cousins but with Binu, a fact which was presumably known and ignored within the families.

Sometimes, such semi-secret liaisons cannot be ignored or tolerated. While elder brothers Joyson and Joey worked away in the Gulf, their wives stayed back in Valiyagramam with their children, their husbands' parents, and the youngest (unmarried) brother, Jojan, then in his late teens. When Joyson came home on leave, his wife appeared around the village with a black eye, while Jojan was extremely subdued: it was rumoured that Joyson had found evidence of an affair between his wife and Jojan, and had beaten the pair of them. One year later, Joey came home unexpectedly, having received a letter from his mother informing him that Jojan had this time been found with his second sister-in-law. A public scene ensued, in which Joey openly beat his wife in the compound outside his house; she was later rushed to hospital, having drunk poison in a suicide attempt. When Joey returned to the Gulf, he took his wife and children with him.

First-night Fears: The Problem of Virginity

In contrast to the uninhibited sexual adventuring of young men like Jojan, a hospital gynaecologist revealed that on Saturdays and Sundays he had to deal with the queries of 'queues' of would-be-husbands. The main preoccupation was their wedding night: 'What will happen on my first night? Will I be able to satisfy my bride? Is my penis big enough? Will I get an erection?' The same issues are regularly discussed in a variety of popular weekly publications such as *Doctor's Answers* and in some soft-porn magazines. From the letters' columns of these publications, psychologists and sexologists answer the questions of worried readers, usually concerning preoccupations about not being able to 'cool down' (as sexual intercourse is commonly described) one's own new wife[13].

Part of the would-be-husbands' fears reflect common notions about young women's sexuality. The following is a composite version of a story we heard about several marriages and constitutes another piece of contemporary mythology: -

> 'The bride they brought here last week was so shy and nervous. She was crying and downcast far more than necessary (i.e. than would be required to preserve her reputation as innocent and reluctant), and looked genuinely miserable to be married. She didn't dare look at her new husband, and he couldn't get her to smile or talk to him. On her first night, she pleaded with her sister-in-law, "Don't leave me; I'm so

> scared, please stay with me and let me sleep with you tonight". The sister-in-law agreed. The next day, the bridegroom, who still couldn't even make his bride speak to him, went out with his friends. That night, the bride again cried and pleaded to be allowed to sleep with the sister-in-law, who again agreed. On the third night, the sister-in-law told the new bride that she wanted to show her something. She instructed the bride to go into a room, saying, "I'll be along in just a minute". As the bride went in, she heard the key turn outside the door and realized that she was alone in the room with her new husband. The next morning, everyone waited to see what would happen. The pair emerged from the room late and dishevelled, smiling and laughing. The bride fed her husband his breakfast, and insisted on sitting next to him; throughout the day, she refused to leave his side and kept grabbing his arm and squeezing his knee. When his friends came to call for him, she sulked and told him not to go out with them; by nine o'clock she was obviously impatient to go to bed.'

Tellers of tales such as this generally laughingly conclude that the bride in question has been like this ever since, and cannot keep her hands off the new husband she initially spurned. This story alludes to the unpredictability of the wedding-night experience and to the nature of female sexuality, which is said to be often surprisingly strong: after her wedding, even the most timid of brides may reveal herself as sexually demanding. If a husband fails to satisfy his newly married wife's sexual desire, she will eventually look elsewhere. Aiyappan's north Kerala male informants, discussing the merits of fraternal polyandry, argued that women are '…by nature prone to sin if their appetite for sexual enjoyment is not kept super-satiated' (1944:103). To avoid future problems, a young woman's physical and character make-up has then to be carefully matched up to that of a suitable man. When Shijini's family were trying to find a suitable match for their tall, strong and wilful daughter, they favoured one suitor over the others on the grounds that he worked in a metal workshop and, as a man in contact with strong things—steel, iron—would be strong himself and hence able to handle her. His family had also been looking for a woman as strong as Shijini to 'handle' their son, whose reputation as a 'strong-man' was compounded by his notorious partiality to liquor and occasional visits to sex-workers. Here 'strength' and 'heat' are partially euphemisms for, partly the idiom of expression of, and partly an actual ethno-physiological understanding of, desire.

Grooms' anxieties about their first wedding night also reflect one highly

particular concern, regarding the dangers entailed in having sexual relations with a post-pubescent virgin. These dangers are of a dual nature. The first and most apparent arises from the risks of pollution derived from the act of defloration, i.e. contact with hymeneal blood (cf. Gough 1955:75; Allen 1976:314). The second danger concerns heat. Post-pubescent virgins, whose internal heat and sexual desire has been building up since menarche, are considered to be extremely 'hot' and consequently prone to unrestrained sexual desire, which could consume completely the semen from the body of a man (cf. Daniel 1984: chp. 4). This link between bodily heat and sexual desire is not metaphorical but literal, rooted within local non-Muslim physiology, which draws strongly on Ayurvedic ideas. All adolescent and fertile adults are hot (Daniel 1984:84ff; Beck 1969:553). Internal heat is generated in various ways: by menstruation, childbirth, consumption of hot food, sexual desire, as well as being inherent in particular body types (plumpness is cooler than thinness) and produced by certain emotional states (anger, jealousy and desire). Excessive heat in the body is an undesirable and dangerous condition: it causes the body to be wasted away by internal consumption (Zimmermann 1987:177), while the heat can radiate out to damage people around. Although heat is necessary for life (total coldness is death; the motor of all action is heat and desire, in its most general sense), an ideal balanced bodily state is represented among Hindus and most Christians as one of relative coolness (Osella and Osella 1996).

Women are relatively hotter than men, partly because menstruation and pregnancy produce a concentration of blood in the womb (see e.g. Fuller and Logan 1985: 91; Selwyn 1979:685). First menstruation is represented as an extremely heating affair and is spoken of as a process of 'boiling over' (cf. Beck 1969:562; Kapadia 1996:92ff). The heat caused by menstruation may be dangerous and polluting, albeit auspicious. It can be partially contained by using 'cooling' agents, such as menstrual seclusion and purificatory bathing and oiling of menstruating women, as well as with rituals at the onset of menarche. Women, by reason of this greater heat, are often regarded as having higher sexual desire than men (cf. Tapper 1979:7; Babb 1970:146). Strong heat, although synonymous with *shakti* (life force) and latent fertility, is potentially dangerous: it should be contained, reduced and transformed (Fruzzetti et al.1982: 10; Fuller 1980:333-9). Women's excess heat is controlled by binding (wearing tight upper garments, necklaces, bangles) and sealing the body (oil baths and *rasnadippodi*—medicinal ash) and reduced by regular sexual intercourse with the husband; a woman is truly cool only after childbirth and when breast-feeding her baby. Unless a woman is regularly cooled down by semen (an extremely cool substance),

people say that the heat generated by menstruation and unsatisfied sexual desire will go upwards to her head, making her violent and insane. All this is common knowledge across much of South Asia. But what is almost never discussed in the literature is the fact that men too 'over-heat' and, as a result, can constitute a danger. If they do not regularly 'discharge', men's semen gradually increases 'heat' unless it is otherwise refined and channelled (e.g. through the *kundalini* channel by means of yoga and other minority ascetic practices). In summary, the excess heat produced by unsatisfied sexual desire and by unreleased sexual fluids is a general pathological state, which affects both sexes, although women's physiology makes them relatively more prone and susceptible to its effects and at a younger age.

The number of strategies available for dealing with the heat increase of menarche, which fall into techniques of cooling or containment, have been decreasing since the switch away from matriliny and the associated introduction of reformed marriage practices in the 1920s (see Osella and Osella 2000a; Arunima 2003; Kodoth 2001; Jeffrey 1976 for details). As the pre-pubertal *tali*-tying ritual no longer exists to *take the heat off* before young women complete sexual maturity, their reproductive powers are more than ever tinged with potential danger. Still unmarried, still a virgin, yet sexually mature, young women's blood boils over with the heat of uncontrolled and unsatisfied sexual desire, the symptom of female fertility. While the difficulties of dealing with hymeneal blood can never be fully resolved, in the absence of ritual or other means of reducing young women's bodily heat, and with increasingly late marriage, young men's worries about the wedding night appear not unreasonable.

Conclusions: Sexualities Beyond Pathologies

Existing anthropological work on south Asian sexuality prove unsatisfactory starting points in dealing sensitively with real-world material. Some offer us textual associations of semen and bodily fluids; as anthropologists, we are doubtful about how much sense some of these Hindu textual associations make to contemporary Indians, including Christians, with whom we worked in Valiyagramam. Our recent fieldwork among urban Muslims contradicts much of what is claimed as 'south Asian', in that we find a quite different ethnophysiological base and set of preoccupations and evaluations with regard to fertility, body heat, sexuality and so on, which we will write about elsewhere (Osella and Osella forthcoming). The psychoanalytically motivated theories are perhaps the most problematic of all, being almost totally dislocated from Indian practices or theories of personhood and

sexuality. They effectively pathologise Indian childrearing and attachment practices, and an entire male population and its relations with women.

Carstairs and Das are among those who infer psychic conflict from ideal social rules; in practice these 'rules' may or may not be heeded, may or may not be internalized. Evaluation of restraint rules as 'too-strict' also betrays naïve normative assumptions being made about male sexual desire: it is experienced frequently; it is overpowering; it demands expression; its expression must involve ejaculation. Seabrook's material makes plain that some men seek 'discharge' daily, while others are content with a monthly encounter (Seabrook 2000). We have shown elsewhere that ambiguous normative statements of the kind, 'A balance between heat and coolness in the body is essential for health', far from provoking anxiety, facilitate an appearance of social consensus by hiding and permitting a variety of understandings (Osella and Osella 1996)[14]. We believe, then, that the statement made to men, 'You should have some sexual activity, but not too much', works in a similar way: not to provoke anxiety, but to assuage it, by permitting a plurality of interpretations. Leaking bodily fluids may certainly be interpreted as symptom of excess heat; sexual activity, which 'takes the heat off' people, need not be feared under these circumstances, but is actually part of the cure and a healthy practice.

The ahistorical nature of earlier writing on desire and sexual practice is also extremely problematic, as the powerful forces that have shaped and acted upon sexuality are often overlooked. Even a cursory examination of Kerala's recent history shows the several influences that have joined to lead towards today's situation. In Chapter 3, we showed how colonialism led to a new stress upon a "familial ideology" (Arunima 2003:163) based around the pure "wife-mother". During the post-colonial period, the purity and morality of Indian women has become an important plank of national pride and of resistance to neo-colonial cultural hierarchies: 'Indian woman' acts as a point of distinction which amounts to symbolic capital for Malayali men and women alike over Europeans, whose women are widely assumed to be *cheetha pennungal* (bad women). Growing tourist traffic in Kerala has contributed to the expansion of this splitting myth, while cable and satellite television intensifies it. The combined effect of 19th and 20th century experiences of a normalising morality and changed marriage practices is that young Malayali women are assumed to be, and must publicly demonstrate themselves to be, pure and innocent of sexual matters before marriage. Young men, meanwhile, whose opportunities for sexual liaisons remain highly limited, experience an uneasy fascination towards the figure of the *madamma*, the European/white-skinned woman, presumed to be of

easy morals and sexually adventurous. While Caldwell has provided a reflexive account of her trials in the field, she has not taken reflexivity to the point of engaging with the implications for European female ethnographers of coming into the field on the back of this stereotype, nor has she examined her own investments in a sexualized Orient (Caldwell 1999; cf. Stoler's 1995 critique of Foucault for failing to take into account the work wrought by colonialism on European sexual sensibilities). Nor has she been critical towards the Orientalist moves inherent in accounts of south Asian sexuality which continue to make South Asian men 'lesser men', because allegedly involved in pathologized/ing gender relations.

The fear complex that is widely argued to be a widespread south Asian one of defective masculinity—rooted in an immature sexuality—actually, we find, comes down to just one bounded instance: young men suffering from one highly specific fear, related to ethno-physiology (virgins are dangerous and hot; you need a lot of strength to break a hymen and take virginity). Wedding night anxiety is a specific—and one-off—case; the wedding night is also a 'crossing point', a rite of passage, which might reasonably be expected to be associated with danger.

In Kerala, young people especially are very interested in sex and, far from being afraid or ambivalent, try to get as much information about it and as much chance of actually doing it as possible, within the limits set by public morality. While they may suffer some degree of hostility or anxiety arising from the gendered double-standard and from the difficulties of actually making sexual contact, clandestine relationships suggest that heterosexual desire, while publicly unacknowledged, is cultivated and often expressed. While young men and women alike are interested in having flirtations, contemporary young women's duty to preserve their virginity and reputation means that desire for them is more likely to be channelled towards the future husband. At the same time, while freer than young women, young men's desire is also generally a semi-secret, only unproblematic if it remains within the peer group: the suicide of the young man whose affair with an older widow was discovered shows that, although a double-standard may operate, shame (*nanam*) in sexual matters is not an exclusively female preserve.

In this context, the existence of strong structures of homosociality and the spaces made available by a homosocial world allows a play of friendships, affection and sometimes desire beyond the matrix. The homosocial world may sometimes offer a respite from the responsibilities, frictions and restrictions of marriage; in the next chapter, we turn to discuss one instance of this dynamic.

Notes

1. This characterisation has of course been debated, as has the exact chronology of the shift to contemporary 'sexuality' see e.g. discussion in (ed) Ruth Vanita 2002, Introduction and in Bachmann 2002.
2. See e.g. Roland's sharp criticism of those who, having never visited India, typify the 'Indian character' as 'Oral, suffering from reactive oral sadism', 1988:268
3. Quibbles over whether men's sexual anxiety is an expression of oedipal castration anxiety or a more generalized envelopment anxiety are irrelevant to non-specialists like anthropologists (Roland 1988:262; Kurtz 1992:171-2). We are interested only in the part of the equation which links semen-loss fears with sexual anxiety and 'bad mothers'.
4. Compare Sarah Lamb's thoughtful and empathetic account of her struggles to make sense of and adapt to local requirements of feminine decency, and the payoffs it provided in terms of both better relationships and insight (2000:182). We are not uncritical of Kerala gender relations, and certainly have experienced some of the frustrations described by Caldwell and others who have worked there (see also the Introduction to Busby 2000). Our stance is that as foreign anthropologists and as part-time residents uninvited by local people, it is not our place to 'challenge' local norms, but to work as far as possible within them and adapt our behaviour. Moreover, fieldwork and relationships are not best served by confrontation. We believe that local women (and men), who actually do live out their lives within Kerala society, are the agents who have the right to challenge and transgress its conservativism.
5. And we probably don't need to point out that 'minimal clothing' is an inaccuracy. See below, when we discuss negative assessments of foreign tourists on just this question of 'decent dress'.
6. The spread of the internet has opened up new avenues for accessing pornography. Unlike neighbouring Karnataka or Tamil Nadu, the space of Kerala's 'internet centres' is normally divided into booths where users can discretely browse pornographic sites. When during our 2002-4 fieldwork we checked browsers' 'history' on internet centres PCs, we found that the majority of visited sites were explicitly pornographic
7. This of course has great fascination and impact in a culture in which nakedness is normatively forbidden for any adult at any time; one of the highlights of a trip to an expensive sex workers is said to be 'the strip'. Respondents asserted that 'everybody' makes love in darkness, fully clothed. Whether this is true or not, girls are certainly advised that their husbands will think them shameless and sexually experienced if they allow them to see them naked.
8. The private beach belonging to the five-star hotel where Indian, Russian and European tourists stay (as opposed to the European 'travellers', who stay in cheap guest-houses with beach cafes attached) has a uniformed guard with a whistle, whose chief occupation is to chase away the gangs of boys who try to come onto the beach. Opportunities for ogling and *jackie* are thereby restricted to the 'travellers' beach.
9. It would be very shameful for a boy to look at girls in front of his male elders. If he goes to Kovalam with his father, he will have to split off from the group of elders before contemplating *jackie*.
10. And men, of course, but the visiting groups of boys do not usually pay much

attention to them. *Jackie* at Kovalam is an arena for public performances of heterosexuality.

11. This principle has often been observed in other arenas, for example with regard to drinking alcohol or eating non-vegetarian among high castes (Srinivas 1962; Michelutti forthcoming).
12. Caroline would not, in Kerala, be expected to stay in the house alone at night; it would be scandalous and deemed dangerous. A woman should be accompanied at all times, to protect her and her reputation.
13. The idiom is to 'take the heat off' her.
14. Judith Halberstam has made a similar point about gender itself: that 'the very flexibility and elasticity of the terms "man" and "woman" ensures their longevity' (1998:27).

CHAPTER 7

Homosocial Spaces: The Sabarimala Pilgrimage

Introduction

We continue our exploration of Kerala masculinities by considering the role of religious activities and devotion in the production of specific male aesthetics and styles at the intersection between homosociality and normative heterosexuality. We focus on the annual pilgrimage to Sabarimala, the main temple of the Hindu deity Ayyappan, visited every year by millions of—predominantly Hindu—male devotees from Kerala and from south India as a whole. We suggest that this pilgrimage, an almost exclusively male arena of religious performance, highlights masculinity while constructing a particular style of maleness which draws creatively on an antagonistic relationship between transcendence and immanence—between the worldly householder and the south Asian figure of the ascetic renouncer.

We stress that these categories and relationships are not fixed within an all-encompassing 'Hindu tradition'. Rather, as we have argued in previous chapters with regard to the householder and to sexuality, they are reference points—ideals which are historically contingent and constructed discursively within specific political, economic and cultural circumstances. Particularly salient here are two issues: on the one hand Gulf migration, recent economic liberalisation and the consequent rise of a new moneyed middle-class, all contributing to a redefinition of appropriate life-styles and consumer needs which require (as discussed earlier) careful negotiation between saving and spending. On the other, a re-masculinization of renunciate celibacy within colonial and post-colonial Hindu nationalist discourse making renunciation a source of (political) potency for the householder (see e.g. Monti 2004; Vasudevan 2004, Banerjee 2005).

It is within these wider contexts that the Sabarimala pilgrimage forges entanglements between 'renouncer' and 'householder', bringing into the realm of everyday life a sense of transcendence that is specific to men, with clear masculine-heroic overtones. This transcendence is highlighted by a period of asceticism before and during the pilgrimage, and by progressive identification of pilgrims with the deity, but we argue that it does not stand in opposition to the mundane world in which men are enmeshed. On the contrary, it acts not only as a source of power in the form of blessings from Ayyappan but also as spiritual, moral, and bodily strength displayed and augmented by participation in the pilgrimage, power which can then be tapped into in everyday life. The pilgrimage, undertaken as marker of devotion to the deity and in fulfilment of specific vows, acts as signifier of a man's responsibilities, as son or husband, towards the general welfare of the family. Boys as young as five or six and men well in their 60s undertake the pilgrimage.

Notably, this pilgrimage is a gender-specific ritual activity involving two separate forms of union. On the one hand, it merges individual men with a hyper-masculine deity—himself born from Shiva and Vishnu, two male deities. On the other, it merges each male participant with a larger community of men: other male pilgrims with whom one goes to Sabarimala; the mass of pilgrims one encounters *en route* to and at the shrine, and, ultimately, the category of men as a whole. This is a particular kind of male community: it is ostensibly an egalitarian devotional community—all pilgrims call themselves 'holy man' (*swami*)—but at the same time a hierarchical one, whereby individual pilgrims surrender themselves to a superior spiritual leadership—that of Lord Ayyappan himself, but also to that of their *guruswami*, the more experienced leader of pilgrim groups. Finally, both the pilgrimage itself—from which women of child-bearing age are barred—and also popular myths associated with Lord Ayyappan, highlight important aspects of the relationship between men and women. Lord Ayyappan, born from two male gods, is a celibate deity, a perennial *brahmachari* (celibate student). His great powers derive specifically from his ascetic endeavour, in particular abstention from sexual activities, a practice also followed by pilgrims before and during the pilgrimage. While pre-pubescent girls and post-menopausal women may attend the pilgrimage, they are very few in number, marginal to the great mass of male pilgrims and are relatively ungendered in comparison to the category specifically barred from participation: mature fertile females. It is important to identify the pilgrimage as a gendered ritual, both in view of the markedly different participation rates for men and women and also its overwhelmingly

masculine ethos[1]. But we also see that the structure of the pilgrimage—separation from the world of family and women, immersion in an all-male community, followed by eventual return to the household—not only reinvigorates the pilgrims' efficacy as householders, but, by relegating the pleasures of homosociality to the temporal and spatial confines of the pilgrimage, simultaneously normalizes heterosexuality as a necessary condition of everyday life.

The Pilgrimage

Ayyappan's story

What follows is a composite version of the story of Ayyappan as collected during fieldwork and during Filippo's participation in the pilgrimage over two seasons—once from Thiruvananthapuram, the state capital (as a novitiate *kanniswami),* and once (as seasoned pilgrim) from Valiyagramam itself.

> When the milk-ocean was churned, and all the good things in the world were generated out of it, the demons had stolen from it the *amritha* [ambrosia, eternal life-giving food], properly the property of the gods. The god Vishnu took the form of Mohini [literally desire, passion, in personified feminine form] the irresistibly beautiful temptress, to trick the demons into handing back the ambrosia. He went to the demon's kingdom, where they were all sitting at tables, waiting. There was no woman to serve the food, so the demons could not eat. [Men are served their food by women in Kerala—mother, sister, or wife.] Mohini/Vishnu told them, 'You are all men: who will serve this food? Close your eyes to preserve my modesty and I will come and serve each of you in turn' [Mohini being unrelated and unknown to the demons, she would feel shame at being in their presence]. She/He then ran off with the elixir. When Vishnu later recounted his trick, the god Shiva insisted upon seeing the form of Mohini. Vishnu protested; Shiva insisted. When Vishnu became Mohini, he was so beautiful and irresistible that Shiva forgot that this apparition was in reality Vishnu, was overcome by lust and made love to Mohini. The resultant child, Ayyappan, product of two males, was born from Vishnu's thigh. Shiva and Vishnu were ashamed. They arranged for the child to be found lying in a basket on the bank of the Pamba river, and hence adopted, by the childless Pandalam king. After

> some years, the Pandalam queen gave birth to her own child, whereupon she became jealous of the foundling Ayyappan—the first son, the future king and heir. With the aid of the court physician she hatched a plot. The Pandalam king was told that the queen was extremely ill and dying, and that the only cure was tiger's milk. As the queen had hoped, the unsuspecting and good-hearted Ayyappan, by now an adolescent in his *brahmacharya* period, volunteered to make the arduous and dangerous journey to the hill-forest to get tiger's milk for his adoptive-mother. On the way, in the hill-forest, he encountered a fierce *Mahishi* [she-buffalo], whom he fought and killed. He was helped by a Muslim, Vavarswami, and a 'tribal', Karuppaswami. The she-buffalo transformed into the goddess Ganga, who explained that it was a curse that had transformed her into the buffalo and that Ayyappan's reward, as her slayer and liberator, was to accept her as wife. She also explained to him his divine origin and his mother's trick. Both agreed that he could not stay, as he had to fulfil his [divinely ordained] mission to acquire tiger's milk for his mother [some informants add here that he did not want to marry anyway, being in *brahmacharya* and being a celibate god who would lose his divinity and power if he had sex]. Promising to return, Ayyappan continued his journey, obtained the tiger's milk, and returned to Pandalam riding on a tiger. By now every one had realized his true divine identity. Bidding his adopted family farewell, he set off again for the hill-forest, went to the top of the mountain—Sabarimala—and achieved his divine form, whereupon many male devotees started to come on pilgrimage to worship him[2].

Every first-time Sabarimala pilgrim is a *kanniswami* (*kanni* meaning, literally, 'virgin'). Pilgrims follow Ayyappan's journey through the forest and act out his story. Ayyappan could not neglect his devotees, so he made a pact with the goddess that on the day when no more *kanniswami*s come to worship him he would marry her; in the meantime she sits on guard at the entrance of the shrine to look out for a pilgrimage season where there are no *kanniswami*s. She is known as Malikappurattamma (literally, the mother who resides outside the mansion). It is an explicit duty of Malayali (and other south Indian) men to go on pilgrimage to Sabarimala and to take with them a new *kanniswami*, to prevent the celibate Ayyappan from having to marry the goddess, thereby losing his powers and his capacity to help humans. Fathers and uncles routinely take/initiate the family boys as *kanniswamis* as soon as they seem capable of coping with the journey across the mountains.

Sabarimala temple

Ayyappan is one of the most popular deities in Kerala and in south India as a whole: every year between 6 and 10 million pilgrims from the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh visit Sabarimala. This generates an income for the temple, from offerings and the sale of take-home *prasadam*[3], of Rs 2.14 crores or £1.7 million (according to figures given in 1990 by the temple's government-appointed administrator). Moreover, both the number of pilgrims and temple income are increasing, according to temple administrators, every year[4]. These figures are even more impressive given that the temple is only open for around 120 days a year: the main pilgrimage season lasts about 60 days, from mid-November to the second half of January (the rest of the time the temple opens to devotees only for the first five days of each Malayali calendar month, as well as at 10 days for Malayali New Year, Vishu, summer solstice). The festival season begins on the first day of the Malayalam month of Vrischikam (from mid-November to mid-December) and lasts for 41 days—and is referred to as the *Mandala* period. Then the temple is closed for five days, during which no *puja* (worship) is conducted, as Ayyappan is said to be resting after 41 days of giving *darshan* (divine gaze). The temple opens again for about another three weeks and after 14 days there is the culmination of the festival season, *makaravilakku* (Makaram lights), which we describe next.

On the first day of the Malayalam month of Makaram (from mid-January to mid-February), a movable image of Ayyappan is enthroned on an elephant and taken in procession to the Pamba river where *araatu* (holy bath) is performed. Once bathed, the image is conveyed to receive 'divine gold ornaments' (*thiruvabharanam*) which arrive in another procession from the town of Pandalam, which is the seat of the Ayyappan's adoptive father, the erstwhile Pandalam Rajah, whose descendants ruled one of the region's former princely states. (During this period the temple is closed and the inner sanctum purified.) Huge crowds of pilgrims accompany the procession up into the mountain from Pandalam, together with two divine eagles which are said to circle the sky for the duration of the journey. The gold ornaments are then taken to the temple and placed on Ayyappan's main image. The principal shrine is closed while the chief Brahmin temple priest and his assistants perform *pujas*; outside, a great mass of pilgrims waits, calling Ayyappan's name. At 6.30 p.m., while the doors of the main shrine are still closed, a bright light (*Makara Jyothi*) appears on top of one of the hills surrounding the temple and a bright star appears in the sky, signs indicating the presence and satisfaction of Ayyappan. After a few minutes, the doors of the main shrine open and while *deepharadana*—the circling of holy flame in

front of the deity which concludes every act of *puja*—is performed, the light in the sky disappears. At 12.30 a.m. the main festival continues with the movable image of Ayyappan taken out again in procession to visit the nearby shrine of Malikappurattamma, his hopeful, waiting bride who has meanwhile also been decorated with gold ornaments brought from Pandalam. But when Ayyappan reaches Malikappurattamma's shrine, all torches miraculously extinguish themselves: Malikappurattamma has started her menstruation and a red cloth is draped over the rear part of her shrine. As the goddess is in a state of pollution, Ayyappan is forced to turn back without even seeing her.

The temple is then open for a further seven days, during which a number of rituals connected to the deity's mythology are performed. In particular, during the two following evenings (Makaram 2 and 3), there are processions of a number of deities to the main shrine of Ayyappan: first, Malikappurattamma then, the following evening, Vavarswami, Karuppaswami and Kaduttaswami. The latter three are important minor deities who helped Ayyappan in his fight against Mahishi. In local versions of the Ayyappan myth, Vavarswami is identified as a Muslim brigand and Karuppaswami as the chief or leader of one of the region's so-called forest 'tribal' populations. Both fought against Ayyappan, were defeated, and became his devoted allies and disciples[5]. Kaduttaswami was "a dwarf" created by Shiva—by throwing a hair from his leg on the ground—to help Ayyappan defeat Mahishi. In the middle of the battle against the demon, Kaduttaswami barged in, shouting loudly; when Mahishi heard the shouting she felt dizzy, lost her strength, and thus Ayyappan killed her with an arrow. For Vavarswami, Karuppaswami and Kaduttaswami's loyalty and courage, Ayyappan decided that they should sit forever next to him at Sabarimala. On the seventh day after *makaravilakku*, the Sabarimala pilgrimage season draws to a close with the performance of *gurudi*—mock blood-sacrifice using a cucumber as substitute for a live animal—for all the Sabarimala deities. The main Brahmin priest performs the sacrifice outside the main temple, just north of the Malikappurattamma shrine. After that the temple is finally closed to the pilgrims.

We turn now to discuss the various phases of the pilgrimage, from preparation to its conclusion, including recollections and stories about Ayyappan and the journey to Sabarimala.

Preparations for pilgrimage

Preparations for pilgrimage usually start on the first day of the Malayalam

month of Vrischikam (mid-November), a particularly auspicious day for Hindu worship which is marked by a flurry of other temple festivals and special *puja*s which continue throughout the 41-day *Mandala* period. Preparations begin with the handing over to the pilgrim a neck chain by a *guruswami*—an experienced senior man who has been to Sabarimala many times: pilgrims wear the chain around their neck until return from Sabarimala. From the moment of putting on the chain, pilgrims should follow the mandatory *vratam*—a 41-day period of votive abstinence—which means no meat, alcohol, sex, anger, coarse language and so on; moreover, pilgrims should not shave and should go regularly to the temple for worship. During this period pilgrims become transformed: they are all *swamis* (holy men), incarnations of Ayyappan himself, and are to act, and be treated, as such. They wear a black or orange *lungi* (waist-cloth), address each other as *swami*, greet each other on the street with the cry and response, 'Swamiye!' (the vocative form of *swami*), 'Saranam Ayyappa!' (Ayyappan is my sanctuary/refuge), and attend evening, men-only, devotional singing groups. The parallels with the Brahmin initiation period are, of course, not accidental: both are examples of the temporary adoption of the status as celibate renouncer. In practice, however, and especially in the southern part of Kerala, the period of votive abstinence may be much shorter: pilgrims put on the chain and start abstinence just a few days before the pilgrimage: enough to show a clearly unshaven face, one of the most apparent symbols of a man undertaking votive abstinence. The distinctive black or orange waist-cloth may be worn only on the day of the pilgrimage itself, while other strict prescriptions—such as regular visits to the temple and attendance at devotional singing—may be followed only by a few enthusiastic devotees. In Valiyagramam, some people commented that current casual attitudes towards votive abstinence reflected a decline in 'proper' devotion in Kerala. Raghavan, who has been going to Sabarimala for 18 years and is now a recognized *guruswami*, told us that, 'Only Tamils are big believers nowadays, more devoted to Ayyappan than Malayalis. They follow *vratam* properly, go in big groups with a *guruswami* and cook together… they do the pilgrimage as in the old days.' We have noticed since moving from southern to northern Kerala (in 2002–3) that pilgrims from the north often undertake the journey barefoot, on foot; they seem more intense and observant of votive abstinence than in the south. In the south, we found that the majority looked with some degree of suspicion and bemusement at those pilgrims—especially those from neighbouring Tamil Nadu—who are somewhat 'too keen', strict adherence to ritual prescriptions being taken as a sign of 'backwardness' and lack of sophistication. We will return in Chapter 7 to the

question of Malayali men's self-conscious image as modern and hence wary of anything smacking of 'backwardness'. As one Valiyagramam pilgrim told us, 'Here, Ayyappan is our near neighbour; we can go four or five times a year on pilgrimage if we wish. For those who come from more distant places, it is more of an adventure. They also have to be more observant: for us, Ayyappan is in our territory and will be forgiving with us if we are not strict.'[6] But regardless of whether pilgrims follow votive abstinence strictly or not, everyone agrees that some form and period of abstinence—from sexual intercourse in particular—must be observed. Many villagers reminded us that Ayyappan is a celibate deity and that his miraculous powers derive from his celibacy; stories were recounted of misfortunes befalling men who did not abstain from sex before or during the pilgrimage. For example, the death of a local *guruswami*—also known for dabbling in sorcery (*mantravadam*)—was attributed to his alleged extra-marital relationship with a woman who persuaded him to take her to Sabarimala; overtaken by lust, he agreed to take her disguised as a man, but on his return he fell ill and died.

After a period of votive abstinence, a date is set to go to Sabarimala. Older men told us that in the past pilgrims would leave after the *Mandala* period and a full 41 days of votive abstinence to arrive at the temple in time for the culmination of the festival season—*makaravilakku*—when Ayyappan appears to devotees in the form of a light in the sky above the hills. Nowadays, however, *makaravilakku* tends to be avoided, since the temple on that day will be so crowded that it would take many hours of queuing, and much pushing and shoving, to get sight of Ayyappan, make offerings and receive *prasadam* of honey-balls (*unniappam*). Alternative dates are chosen—usually sometime during the *Mandala* period—relying on the knowledge and experience of *guruswami*s to select a time when crowds would be relatively less dense and numerous.

The pilgrimage is always conducted in groups, and never individually, villagers explaining that in the past the journey to the temple—across mountains and forests populated by wild animals—was so dangerous as to make it unsafe for lone pilgrims. Indeed, the whole rhetoric of the pilgrimage is one of communality and equality before the deity, of large groups of men travelling together under the absolute leadership of a *guruswami*, where personal identity (remember that all pilgrims address each other as '*swami*') and differences of caste, class, or religion disappear (remember that the 'helper' deity, Vavarswami, was Muslim); note also that, unlike other temples in Kerala, non-Hindus are not barred from visiting Sabarimala. The pilgrim, as renouncer, is ideally dead to the differentiated social world of caste/community. Our experience is that in practice, at least

in Kerala (see e.g. Gath 1997) these ideals of equality and community are greatly diluted. Groups of pilgrims are normally relatively small, composed of friends, relatives, or neighbours, and seldom include people of different castes. The majority of the pilgrims in the group with which Filippo travelled from Valiyagramam were people who would be identified locally as coming from low- to middle- or high-ranking caste groups. Few were Dalits (ex-untouchables) or Brahmans; most were Nayars or Izhavas. When larger, multi-caste parties are formed—usually through temple/devotional associations which hire transport to take pilgrims to the site where the pilgrimage proper starts—they tend to split into smaller groups once the bus journey ends and the ascent to the temple begins. At the temple itself, there is both a strong sense of *communitas*, as men are confronted by and merge with a mass of pilgrims all dressed in a similar fashion, all carrying on their heads offerings for the deity and all calling each other '*swami*', and also simultaneously a sense of separateness. Groups of pilgrims, large or small as they might be, carry on their ritual duties quite oblivious of each other, with little interaction between groups, albeit within a general atmosphere of friendship, tolerance and elation. And even if an egalitarian community of worshippers is created during the pilgrimage, it might be an extremely short-lived one, especially for those of comparatively low-caste in local terms. A number of older Izhava pilgrims reminded us that in the past they had gone to Sabarimala with high-caste neighbours, helping each other and sharing food during the journey, only to be confronted by the same old pollution distance on return to the village. We will see later that this apparent falling-short of the renunciatory ideal does not in fact make the pilgrims any less like renouncers.

Returning to the pilgrimage preparations, on the evening selected for the journey—normally the pilgrimage starts as soon as possible after dusk to avoid walking up the steep hill leading to the temple in the heat of the day—a group of pilgrims would congregate at the house of a *guruswami*[7] after visiting a temple. *Guruswamis* are older men who have gone to Sabarimala many times—at least 18 times, some people told us (a point to which we shall return later)—who are known for their devotion to Ayyappan, and who have acquired considerable practical and ritual knowledge about the pilgrimage. While many people in Kerala may undertake the pilgrimage journey itself unaccompanied by a *guruswami*, the latter's ritual knowledge and expertise are essential to the initiation of pilgrims and their preparation for the journey.

We now provide a composite description of the rituals in which Filippo participated as preparation for the pilgrimage. Either inside a household *puja*

room or in the courtyard of a home or a temple, under a canopy prepared for the occasion, a number of offerings (rice, puffed rice, bananas, flowers and incense sticks) and a lighted oil-lamp are placed in front of a garlanded image of Ayyappan; to one side, on plantain leaves, are the offerings which pilgrims will take with them to Sabarimala (often acquired in bulk in specialized shops which sell 'Ayyappan bags'). After performing *puja* to the deity, the *guruswami* lights camphor on a plantain leaf to circle in front of the deity, calling 'Bhagavane' ('Oh Lord!'), then passing on the flame to the pilgrims sitting cross-legged behind him, who receive it, murmuring 'Ayyappan'. Sitting facing the pilgrims, the *guruswami* begins *irumudi kettu* (literally, two head coverings tied together), filling two cloth pouches (which should be black, white, or red) tied into a single bundle with ritual offerings for Ayyappan and his accompanying deities. The *guruswami* begins by pouring clarified butter (*ghee*) into a number of coconuts which have been previously bored with one hole and emptied of their liquid; he seals each with a cork. Each pilgrim then receives a number of items to be placed in the *irumudi*'s two pouches. The main offering to Ayyappan is in the front pouch: one ghee- filled coconut together with three handfuls of rice placed there by the pilgrim or by non-pilgrim relatives, an arecanut wrapped in betel leaf, and, for new pilgrims—the *kanniswami*s—a few coins as *dakshina* (ritual 'payment'). The rear pouch holds another coconut—whole and not filled with *ghee*—to be smashed before ascending to the main Ayyappan shrine and a small bag of turmeric powder; some camphor balls; a small bag of white rice; some tobacco and some betel leaves. A separate bag contains dried grapes, moulded sugar balls and bananas to be offered to the god Ganapathi. As he passes each item to them, the *guruswami* calls, 'Swamiye Ayyappa' and as pilgrims receive each item they call, 'Ayyappa Saranam' (Ayyappan is my refuge'). Now the *irumudi* bundles are securely tied with string and pilgrims mix together the remaining offerings in front of Ayyappan's image and distribute them as *prasadam* to all those who have been present at the preparation. The pilgrims are now ready to leave. They make the devotional gesture of touching the feet of senior family members, give *dakshina*—a few coins wrapped in betel leaf—and receive blessings from non-pilgrim friends and relatives. The *guruswami*, standing behind them, balances an *irumudi* pouch on the head of each pilgrim who in return touches the guru's feet and offers *dakshina*. The pilgrims walk backwards out of the house or *pandal* and circle three times around a rock placed at the centre of the courtyard before smashing a coconut on it. The household's women and children gather at the threshold to watch their menfolk depart. The men leave without turning to look back, accompanied for a while

along the way by male relatives and friends, who encourage them with loud calls of 'Swamiye Ayyappa', demanding the pilgrims' response, 'Ayyappa saranam'. Finally, pilgrims set off in hired coaches and minibuses for Sabarimala, shouting and singing Ayyappan songs. From the time of departure until safe return, women will keep an oil lamp lit in the *puja* room of pilgrims' houses.

Pilgrimage preparation acts unequivocally as a rite of passage. Pilgrims are separated from their usual environment and social relations, and their bodies are marked out in particular ways—unshaven, barefoot, wearing a black or an orange waist-cloth and carrying *irumudi* bundles on the head. They lose their social identity and become *sannyasi*s (renouncers) incorporated into a wider undifferentiated community of men, while at the same time 'becoming like' Ayyappan himself. This process of separation, transformation and incorporation evokes death. Funerary symbolism is evoked at many moments of the ritual: pouring rice onto the ghee-filled coconut in the *irumudi* which will later replace the pilgrim himself resembles that part of funerary rites when rice is poured onto the head/mouth of the deceased; walking backwards away from house or *pandal* recalls that dead bodies are taken backwards—head first—out of the house on their way to the funeral pyre; walking around a rock in the courtyard three times is like the turning around of the corpse three times before it is taken off for cremation (cf. Gath 1997: 160; Sekar 1992: 55). Associations of death and cremation are again evident in the performance of *aazhitullal*—fire-walking—optionally undertaken by pilgrims before filling the *irumudi* [8]. None of this is surprising, given the ritual transformation of pilgrims into renouncers: like renouncers, pilgrims perform their own death rituals in an act of self-sacrifice and self-annihilation—a recurrent pilgrimage theme—which allows them to merge with Ayyappan himself.

To Sabarimala and back

There are two routes to Sabarimala: the long and the short. The first route, some 65 kilometres long and taking several days to complete, starts at Erumeli, the small town where it is said that the dead body of Mahishi landed after having been tossed in the air by Ayyappan. At Erumeli there is a mosque dedicated to the Muslim Vavarswami and an Ayyappan temple. From Erumeli, pilgrims begin an arduous climb through forests and steep hills, encountering along the way a number of sacred sites associated with Ayyappan's journey to find tiger milk for his mother and with his battle against Mahishi. By following Ayyappan's footsteps, pilgrims eventually

arrive at Pamba, on the banks of the Pamba River, where the final ascent to Sannidhanam (Ayyappan's temple) begins[9]. From Pamba, however, all pilgrims must continue their journey on foot, carrying their *irumudi* bundles on their heads along the way.

At Pamba, pilgrims take a purificatory river bath and then perform a sacrificial feeding (*bali*) for their ancestors. Pilgrims pass many tea-stalls and stores selling religious paraphernalia as well as '*ladies' items*' (men usually take back small gifts such as hair clips or bangles to wives/daughters/mothers), before reaching and making offerings at the shrine to the elephant-headed deity Ganapathi which marks the beginning of the ascent. After a few hundred metres climb, they encounter a member of the family of the former Pandalam Rajah who sits in a hut awaiting *dakshina* in token of his descent from the god's adoptive family. The path then climbs up Appachimeeda, an extremely steep hill which many pilgrims climb running, while continuously invoking Ayyappan's name. At the top they reach a small shrine, Sabaripeedam: here, pilgrims throw moulded sugar balls down into the forest below to pacify the Mala Devans, dangerous forest-dwelling deities. From then on, the path is on flat ground, and after a couple of kilometres pilgrims encounter Saramkuthi Aal, a big banyan tree around which new pilgrims—the *kanniswami*s—deposit a wooden arrow. It is said that an arrow thrown by Ayyappan to indicate to his followers where the temple should be constructed landed here. At the conclusion of the pilgrimage season, Malikappurattamma/Mahishi is taken in procession to this tree to check whether first-time pilgrims have visited Ayyappan. Every year she finds thousands of arrows, indicating that many *kanniswami*s have come and thus that she cannot marry Ayyappan: in sombre mood she returns to her shrine.

Eventually, the Sabarimala temple complex comes into sight: pilgrims queue for hours under a hangar-like shelter and finally arrive in a large square leading to the pilgrimage's culmination, the Pathinettampadi, the holy eighteen golden steps up to the main temple. Before going up the steps, pilgrims first make offerings from their *irumudis* to the shrines of the three key disciple divinities, Vavarswami (the deified Muslim brigand), Karuppaswami, the 'tribal' chief and the 'dwarf', Kaduttaswami, then break a coconut against a special tank on the side of the steps[10]. The shells of the coconuts are collected and burned on a huge sacrificial fire nearby (*homakundam*). Loudly calling Ayyappan's name and taking blessings from each of the steps, pilgrims finally reach the Sannidhanam, Ayyappan's main shrine[11]. Here, the *ghee*-filled coconut is taken to a special counter where it is broken up and the *ghee*, collected by temple officials, is used for *abhishekam* (anointing the deity). Pilgrims join another long queue taking them in front

of the main shrine, where they have a brief *darshan* (sight) of the golden deity. It is an extremely emotional moment: with joined hands, pilgrims pray, call Ayyappan's name and put money—sometimes large wads of cash—or gold ornaments into a large container before the deity. These offerings are on such a vast scale that the temple administration has installed a conveyer belt which transports every item directly to a room below the shrine for sorting, counting and storing. From here, pilgrims move on to take offerings to other deities within the temple complex and to collect honey balls, the main *prasadam*.

Exhausted from the long journey, from heat and from the long hours of queuing, but elated and joyous after receiving the auspicious sighting (*darshan*) of Ayyappan, pilgrims return to Pamba and from there proceed by car or bus. Once home, they go to their household *puja* room to worship Ayyappan and then remove the neck chain they have been wearing throughout the period of the pilgrimage, from the initial period of votive abstinence. They distribute honey balls to family, friends and neighbours. Women also receive the small presents, such as hairclips or bangles, which had been bought in Pamba. Votive abstinence is finally broken; having renounced meat-eating during the pilgrimage, pilgrims now eat their first non-vegetarian meal, prepared by the women of the house. Later, married couples will break their sexual abstinence.

Talking about Sabarimala

A number of recurrent themes emerge when talking with men who have gone to Sabarimala. The fatiguing and dangerous nature of the pilgrimage, rendering it a trial, is always stressed, even exaggerated. Notably, men invariably referred to the possibility of being killed by wild animals (especially tigers and elephants) while in the forest. That this hardly seems likely (the men keep to well-used tracks; there is plenty of noise; tigers have all but disappeared), and appears never to have actually happened, does not detract from the genuine apprehension which people seem to feel at the prospect of entering deep into 'the forest', that symbolically loaded space of Hindu mythology. This is heightened among *kanniswami*s, the first-time pilgrims: in Daniel (1984: 249), the anthropologist appears to have entered this mood, to judge from his characterization of the journey he undertook as being through 'forests infested with elephants, bears, leopards'. By talking about, and 'talking up', the dangers of the pilgrimage, men explicitly identify with Ayyappan's perilous journey through the forest and with his bravery, while coding the pilgrimage as an ordeal, an act of masculine heroism (see

Fuller 1992: 217). The men we spoke with often argued that women are barred from the pilgrimage for their own safety, or suggested that women lack the physical and mental strength to endure such an arduous journey. Others reminded us that women could not keep 41 days' votive abstinence because menstruation would take place, and hence impurity ensue[12].

But even manly courage, strength and purity may be insufficient to pull the participant through the ordeal: men talk about miraculous encounters with Ayyappan helping them along the arduous way to Sabarimala. In pilgrims' tales, the deity, in various guises, comes to the rescue of imperilled pilgrims, typically those who get lost in the forest or are attacked by wild animals. Ayyappan also manifests himself to offer encouragement and strength to exhausted pilgrims whose resolve is flagging (cf. Gath 1997: 200–2). Miraculous encounters with Ayyappan are affirmations of pilgrims' spiritual and moral worthiness: Ayyappan will only help those who follow votive abstinence and surrender themselves to him.

In their accounts of pilgrimage experience, many men also highlight a particular atmosphere that is experienced at Sabarimala. On return from his second pilgrimage, everyone asked Filippo whether he had 'felt something different' there. Madhavan, a Nayar shopkeeper who had been to Sabarimala many times, told us:

> When you keep *vratam* for some days, you forget passions and bad things. The body becomes healthier, and so does the mind: you think of Ayyappan and forget all your trouble. You go to Sabarimala to fulfil a vow, sometimes you are sent there because someone else has made a vow—your mother or a brother. But you also go there for personal pleasure in the experience.

Another pilgrim mused: 'There is a special atmosphere at Sabarimala, because everyone has only Ayyappan in mind and there are no such tensions and pressures as you normally experience at home.' The sense of merging with Ayyappan (or of taking refuge in him—*swami saranam*) is heightened by the pilgrimage's sacrificial symbolism. Pilgrimage preparations are a self-sacrificial death which blends individual men into a community of *swami*s/renouncers and, importantly, into Ayyappan himself. This process becomes most apparent in the final stages of the pilgrimage.

First, pilgrims should break a coconut on the holy 18 steps. Until the practice was discontinued in 1986, this involved a direct reference to the individual's pilgrimage experience: on your fourth pilgrimage, you would have broken a coconut on the fourth step and so on. Coconuts in Kerala are

normally used in rituals and sacrifices as substitutes for people, a relation of homology being drawn between coconut trees and the human body, coconuts and human heads. The ritual breaking of coconuts is generally understood in Kerala as a sacrificial offering where the fruit stands as substitute for the individual performing the sacrifice. At Sabarimala, the coconut's broken shell is then destroyed on a huge sacrificial fire reminiscent of a funeral pyre. Many Sabarimala old hands told us that in the past, once a pilgrim had been to Sabarimala 18 times, he was allowed to plant either a coconut or an areca sapling in the temple compound, in the same way that Malayali Hindu mourners plant coconut or areca samplings on the spot where a dead relative has been cremated (see Osella and Osella 2004; Uchiyamada 1995). That the second coconut, filled with *ghee*, is also broken up and its contents used to anoint Ayyappan in the temple, suggests not only death but also merger with the deity. Valentine Daniel's phenomenological account of the Sabarimala pilgrimage focuses on these cosmological and physiological dimensions. Pilgrims, he argues, progressively shed various layers of self as they proceed along their journey, experiencing pain, discomfort and tiredness, ultimately achieving complete merger with the deity once they climb the holy 18 steps—each one said to be associated with particular elements making up the gross and subtle body—and find themselves in front of Ayyappan. Our understanding is that identification with Ayyappan might occur at a rather earlier point, indeed from the point when the pilgrim undergoes the initial preparation ritual, and is then heightened by sudden miraculous encounters with the deity along the way. As suggested by Alex Gath, pilgrims do not just go to Sabarimala 'to Ayyappan', but also 'as Ayyappan' and 'with Ayyappan' (Gath 1997: 198ff).

Yet we also want to argue, *contra* Daniel, that transcendence via merger with Ayyappan (1984: 264 ff.) does not in any sense erase worldly concerns (see also Gath 1997: 282). Pilgrims go to Sabarimala not with self-transformation and certainly not with *moksha* (final release) in mind, but hoping to receive the blessing of Ayyappan, seeking concrete help in resolving mundane problems such as having a child, finding a job, prosperity in business and so on. A pilgrim seen leaving a substantial wad of cash in front of Ayyappan's shrine told Filippo that, 'I run a business in Madras in partnership with Ayyappan: he helps me, and every year I bring him his share of the profit'. For the not-yet-successful, in an environment where finding a 'good' job—especially in the Gulf—depends just as much on luck and connections as it does on skills and qualifications and where finding employment is an essential step into proper masculinity, Ayyappan's blessing can provide much-needed supernatural help. This is a much wider

trend: in the last 20 years we have witnessed a proliferation of temples (and also churches and mosques) and of rituals which specialize in assisting Gulf migration and promoting financial success, as well as offering solutions to the problems created by migration itself (see Osella and Osella 2004a). We locate the increasing popularity of the Sabarimala pilgrimage in a renewal in interest and participation in religious activities generated by growing consumption needs and consequent anxieties among men—the providers/bread-winners—over the ability to meet such demands, a generalized orientation towards 'miracles' which stands in stark contrast to the Comaroffs' 'occult economies' (1999).

One frequently stated reason for going to Sabarimala is the desire for children. Having children—sons in particular—is of course one of the most important markers of manhood (see Busby 2000; cf. C. Osella 1993). While the pilgrimage stresses asceticism and especially sexual abstinence, (hetero)sexual desire and sexual potency often become emphasized during the return journey. Young Malayali men in particular might find it entirely appropriate to round off their period of abstinence and pilgrimage by asking the bus driver to make a detour to allow a pleasure-trip to the beach resort of Kovalam, the trip's explicit intention being to obtain sexual gratification. Kovalam stands in stark contrast to the austerely masculine environment of Sabarimala. As mentioned in Chapter 6, it is a bustling resort outside the state capital, frequented by tourists, both foreign and Indian middle-class urbanites, and holding heady promises of glamour and squalor in equal measure. The main tourist season, around Christmas, conveniently coincides with the Sabarimala season. For the most daring, Kovalam also offers the services of local sex workers.

We do not wish to give undue emphasis to the behaviour of these young Malayali men, who are perhaps unrepresentative of the whole, although they do present a striking contrast to the young male pilgrims from neighbouring Tamil Nadu. These latter devotees' visits to Kovalam tend to involve sea excursions in hired local boats, during which they chant and sing songs in praise of Ayyappan, studiously ignoring the undraped women all around them. What we do want to suggest is that the Sabarimala pilgrimage, with its determinedly male and masculine nuances, appears to provide men with an enhancement or reinforcement of their masculine powers, including the productive and reproductive capabilities which are what allow men to engage with adult status. Sabarimala represents a particularly masculine, and hetero-normative, way to explore and resolve some of the tensions of the male position within the household and wider social life. If the pilgrimage, by emphasizing renunciation, distances and

detaches men from everyday life and offers a respite from the demands of domesticity—'there are no such tensions and pressures as you normally experience at home', as one respondent remarked—at the same time, it allows men to draw on the powers of renunciation itself to perform better their role as masculine householders, providers and begetters of children. But at the same time, the ascetic deity is heavily reliant upon the help of his householder devotees: as was seen above, Ayyappan needs annual visits of new pilgrims in order to remain celibate and hence, retain his ascetic power.

The 'Householder' and the 'Renouncer' Revisited

The pilgrimage, we suggest, has something particular to do with men, and with men in their relationships to other men and to women. This in turn has implications for a long-standing issue in south Asian studies: the apparent cultural tension between the householder and ascetic impulses. Louis Dumont's classic account of Hindu social life rests upon several pivotal oppositions. Among the most important is that between the householder's domain of caste and interdependence and the arena of individual self-containment associated with the renouncer. Dumont refers to a master dichotomy ordering Hindu religious practice: that between the 'man in the world and the individual outside the world' (1970: 231). The pair stand in a complementary but oppositional relationship, a claim which has been much debated within south Asian scholarship.

For example, Tambiah explores Buddhist and Brahmanic attitudes towards renunciation, noting that 'orthodox Brahminism has been ambivalent towards, even resentful of the renouncer's vocation, and has incorporated it as an end… appropriately adopted only as the last stage of a man's life cycle, especially after the life of the householder has been completed and its aims fulfilled' (1982: 317). In Buddhism, on the other hand, 'the very existence of the renouncer assumed the necessary presence of the lay householder … upon whom he was materially dependent' (1982: 318). Thapar attempts to historicize the opposition, demonstrating the cultural *dialogue* which was taking place between representatives of Jaina, Buddhist and Hindu thought and the threatening implications for Vedic sacrificer-householders of renunciation. This she sees as a threat which eventually led, via pragmatism, to the incorporation and dilution of renunciation within the Hindu theory of four life stages (*ashramas*) (1982).

While the householder ideal has thus effectively won out historically as the dominant orientation for men approaching maturity, and while over time and within the different south Asian religious traditions there have

been many interpretations of the relative importance or status of the householder and renouncer, and of the relationship between them, the idea of a tension or opposition between the two has generally been felt useful. Complementarity within early Buddhism grows into conflict and downright hostility by the time we reach current ethnography: '[R]enouncers … are usually accorded respect in face-to- face encounters… When talking about them generally, however, they are reviled … [Dumont] is quite right in speaking of "subdued hostility" towards renunciation' (Madan 1982: 244). Yet at the same time, Madan tells us that 'The virtues of the life of the householder [are] … said to flow from "detachment in enjoyment" which is the essence of renunciation' (1982: 244). While Madan chooses not to explore this assertion, concerned as he is with balancing out the ethnographic record and affirming the value of the life of the man-in-the-world, his remark makes clear that we are then faced with two apparently antithetical values which refuse to stay apart and inhabit separate domains: the true householder should cultivate virtuosity in the arts of renunciation in order most fully to enjoy his non-renunciation.

In an important article, Burghart (1983) argued for a more nuanced treatment of the renouncer-householder issue by drawing on ethnographic record to consider the world from the ascetic's point of view. Seen from this perspective, and explored by means of an ethnographic account of the orders of sectarian ascetic renunciation known widely as *sampradaya*s, some important distinctions emerge. For example, the transient world which is renounced is not identical to the social world: renunciation need mean neither individualism nor a refusal to engage with others, nor even retreat from the world of caste.

Later studies confirm Burghart's insistence that renunciation does not mean a solitary end to social relationships, nor does it imply indifference to matters of caste or community. Arguing that the renouncer has been 'partly assimilated' with the Brahman householder, Fuller suggests that the 'the "ideal Brahmin" is or is like an ascetic renouncer' (1992: 18). Although Brahmanical purity is partly buttressed by, and dependent upon, the existence and services provided by both the Brahmin's wife and those deemed to be of lower-caste, their dependence upon inferiors is denied at an ideological level. In other words, Brahmins' ritual superiority depends just as much on their complementary hierarchical relations with lower castes as on a renouncer-inspired denial and detachment from the same. At the same time, popular Hindu devotionalism, making the goals of renunciation available to everyone, has universalized the endeavour of the renouncer. While van der Veer (1988; 1994) makes the point that renouncers and

ascetic sects have seldom been detached from the world of caste and hierarchy, Mills (2000) shows that Buddhist monks do not turn away from the values of kinship and Srivastava (1999) offers ethnography of renouncers' continuing visits to—and links with—their 'renounced' families and villages.

These debates mean two things for our purposes here: first, that we can discount such classic Dumontian characteristics of 'true' asceticism as individualism, lack of social ties, flouting of caste and so on; secondly, that the world of the householder and the renouncer are clearly not hermetically sealed off from each other either socially or ideologically, regardless of Burghart's insistence upon 'two conceptual universes'. The Sabarimala pilgrimage suggests a particular articulation of the relationship between the (non-Muslim and non-Christian) householder and renouncer : here, in the first place, through a relationship of reciprocal empowerment, both householder and renouncer acquire the means to fulfil their separate socio-cultural roles. The lesson learnt from Sabarimala is that the man-in-the-world (the pilgrim) needs to draw upon the power of the renouncer to be a successful householder, just as the man-outside-the-world (the celibate Ayyappan) requires the support of the householder and a continuing line of men to maintain his ascetic powers. At the same time, the man-in-the-world must actually himself take on the mantle of the man-outside-the-world in order to fulfil his (productive and reproductive) responsibilities effectively. With an act of pilgrimage, a householder becomes an ascetic and moves into an all-male community of ascetics; with no *kanniswami*s to visit him, Ayyappan would marry Malikapurattamma and become himself a householder. His potential bride waits perpetually nearby, and the story's conclusion is forever deferred[13]. Ayyappan's myths do not end with his spurned lover disappearing, leaving him to retreat into the forest: rather, the couple and the promise of marriage are held in timeless tension and deferral, dependent upon the annual pilgrim cycle. The world of the renouncer and that of the householder are not incompatible but continually impinge and spill over onto each other, while being co-dependent and mutually transformable.

We wish to stress, however, that the relationship between 'householder' and 'renouncer' is not simply embedded in a tension between ideal categories and practice. The Ayyappan pilgrimage and its masculinity themes have unmistakable political overtones, related to Hindutva movements which have become increasingly active in the south Indian states since the early 1990s. One recent work on Hindu nationalism notes that in India, 'celibacy is the preferred state for possessing concentrated masculine vigour'. In Hindu chauvinist discourse, 'This masculinity, achieved through

renunciate celibacy, is in marked contrast to the Buddhist emphasis on celibacy which leads to escapism and emasculation' (Chakravarti 1998: 256; see also Banerjee 2005: 43ff). An equally significant point is made by the cinema historian, Ravi Vasudevan, in an analysis of the film *Hey Ram*, directed by the south Indian film-maker, Kamal Hassan. The film is ostensibly critical of Hindu nationalism, but Vasudevan notes that it connects renunciation with notions of virile political potency: the plot turns on 'Muslim violence' as a force which awakens Hindu masculinity, transforming a quiet householder into an avenging renouncer (Vasudevan 2004). Hindu renunciation is thus explicitly marked out as an active and aggressive state which is linked to masculine potency, an analysis confirmed by Charu Gupta's study of the ways in which Hindu-Muslim relations become troped through the sexually predatory Muslim against whom the good Hindu man was obliged to assert his own masculinity (2002; cf. Ansari 2005). This renunciatory style distances itself from any negative connotations of passivity because it always holds the promise of resolution and gain—a return to strength and an augmentation of power. We note that in Valiyagramam one of the most devoted of Ayyappan's *guruswami*s, indeed the devotee who led the fire-walking ritual that preceded the pilgrimage, was widely known in the area as a 'rowdy' or thug attached to one of the most militant pan-Indian Hindu supremacist organizations, the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh); he was a man much feared by local Dalits (ex-untouchables) with leftist political affiliations. It is also notable that in recent years two local temples closely associated to Ayyappan's devotees have been sites of political violence. In Kerala, participation in 'public' Hinduism in the form of pilgrimages and various forms of temple-related activity often has a strong Hindutva dimension. Returning to Valiyagramam in 2002, we found that the vast majority of temple committees in the area had become dominated by RSS militants and sympathizers, a move which the left parties tried to contain—rather unsuccessfully—by directing their own supporters to try to adopt a prominent role in these same committees and the activities which they organize (see Osella and Osella 2004).

In south India, it is not unusual to find either Hindu gods relying on the help or protection of Muslim subordinate deities (see e.g. Hiltebeitel 1989) or Muslim saints becoming assimilated to the pantheon and religious practices of other groups (see Bayly 1989) and, less often, vice versa[14]. Yet Kerala's largely progressive public discourse since the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, has preferred to represent Sabarimala—where non-Hindus are allowed to participate and where Ayyappan has a Muslim and a 'tribal' as helpers—as a truly unique, non-communal religious event expressing an

inherent and particularly Malayali egalitarian spirit, where everyone is equal as a *swami*. This rhetoric is now being progressively superseded by another, gaining currency both in public discourse and private conversations. This latter suggests that those deemed non-Hindu others, like Ayyappan's non-Hindu helpers, can only be incorporated into a (re-masculinized) Hindu community as tamed subjects, in the same way as a 'Muslim pirate' and a 'tribal leader' are allowed to sit near Ayyappan after their defeat by the deity (cf. Amin 2005; Ansari 2005)[15]. In reconfiguring the pilgrimage as a 'duty' of the Hindu householder, Hindutva discourse has made the Sabarimala pilgrimage central not only to the discharging of wider masculine responsibilities but also to the participation of all men to an idealized, and re-masculinized, 'Hindu community', a community where the rhetoric of equality is overshot by status and communal hierarchies.

Conclusions: Sabarimala and Masculinity

So far we have suggested that the Sabarimala pilgrimage—a virtually all-male event—underscores and enhances some specific masculine qualities of both deity and visiting devotees (cf. Fuller 1992: 217). Let us think about the pilgrimage's role in the production and representation of specific gendered identities, considering some works of psychological anthropology which explore the formation of the gendered male psyche. We focus especially on Kurtz's attempt to propose a specific 'Indian' path to psychological development and maturity which does not pathologize all Indian men as substantially inadequate, repressed, and un-masculine—as much existing psychological anthropology has done.

Kurtz's central thesis is that willing sacrifice of infantile individual pleasure and individualistic desires is a normal, healthy, developmental path in India. While autonomy and individualism have been put forward as healthy norms under classical Freudian theory, in many societies—including right across south Asia—this sort of self-centredness is not widely regarded as normal or healthy. Following earlier work (e.g. Roland 1988), Kurtz concludes that anthropologists and psychologists alike have greatly underestimated the ways in which groups exercise power in people's inner psychic experience. The south Asian group is not just an external force, curbing an individual's desire to live their own life, as is often supposed by outside commentators. On the contrary, the group actually exists within. The self is already multiple and refers back to the group. The ego structure is not individualized but is an 'ego of the whole' (1992: 103–4).

Kurtz posits renunciation as the key psychic tool in the child's experience

of learning to move towards maturity via participation in the group, and asserts that this process of renunciation on the way to the group can be repeated at any developmental stage or recalled in cultural practice. If we rework Kurtz's thesis towards a more closely gendered interpretation, we could argue that boys and men at Sabarimala are reiterating self-immersion in a larger—but here specifically masculine—social body. This is not done—as in classical Freudian theory—out of an enhanced anxiety about masculine identity leading on to a regressive movement towards self-castration (submission to the guru father figure; refraining from asserting potency and hence the threat of competition, via celibacy). Rather, this move is undertaken in the context of a perfectly normal and universal sense of masculine ambivalence and self-doubt, which in south Asia can take on a specific local-cultural resolution or assuaging by means of immersion in a more potent and larger male self. The south Asian masculine self is at once connected to and embodied within a collectivity of men: those within the family group, the male guru, the senior patriarch, and such hyper-male figures as the deity Ayyappan or idealized masculine iconic heroes, such as the freedom-fighting father of the nation, the post-colonial military leader or the film star.

We could simply agree with Kurtz and argue that the Sabarimala pilgrimage is another example of a cultural practice in which the lesson is again rehearsed and reiterated that mature renunciation leads to a larger and more powerful sense of self connected to the wider group. But, importantly, in this case—and here we also express our general discomfort with psychological explanations which overlook social and historical processes in the formation of individual subjectivities—'the group' is gendered: a group of men. The mature self which is consolidated and evoked at Sabarimala is then a gendered self, a part of the whole which connects an individual man both to a wider group of men (fellow *swami*s, fellow pilgrims) and to senior men (*guruswami*s) as representatives of the masculine group. It at the same time excludes women, thereby highlighting the significance of the pilgrims' membership of and connection to a category of 'men'. Moving, then, from internal to external motivation, we see that the process identified by Kurtz is not at all 'power neutral', leading in fact to the (re)production of specific hierarchical relations between men, and between men and women.

Sabarimala is an opportunity for men to return to the cross-sex world of the householder renewed in potency: it is actually via renunciation and association with other celibate males that an individual man gains the strength to act out the ideal of the successful householder. This process of production of an (illusionary) all-powerful male—empowered by the merging with a hyper-masculine deity and with other men—simultaneously

impinges upon the exclusion of women and underscores their subordination as hierarchical inferior—women have neither the same degree of purity nor the moral strength of men. Excluded from the pilgrimage, women are the abjected other. This process is reiterated in several ways: first, the pilgrim becomes part of a wider, exclusively male body, bound to the group of men alongside whom he undertakes the pilgrimage and its preparations; secondly, membership of a pilgrimage group involves voluntary submission to a senior male, the *guruswami*; thirdly, the male pilgrim also actively seeks identification with, and proximity to, the extraordinarily and impeccably male deity Ayyappan; and eventually the pilgrim is dissolved within and connected to a sea of men who, by their sheer numbers, seem to suggest the entirety of male humanity. But even in the midst of activities which focus on celibate renunciation, matters of progeny and householder responsibilities were uppermost in pilgrims' minds. Men tell us that they go to Sabarimala with children in mind: to protect those already born; to ask for the conception of those desired but yet unborn; to ensure easy births for pregnant wives. Another preoccupation is employment and wealth: men go hoping to get jobs, improve their prospects, or keep their businesses running smoothly. In the end, then, the core prize desired by these renouncers is that of successful mature male householdership: to be a husband and father, a provider. And yet, while men almost universally undertake the pilgrimage in their role as (actual or would-be) householders, thus as men (potentially) connected via sex and procreation to women, the pilgrimage denies altogether men's connection to, and dependence upon, women.

Of particular interest here are insights arising from Jeffords' analysis (1989) of Hollywood 'buddy' films dealing with US war experiences in Vietnam. Jeffords' argument is that equality and friendship between men can be performed and celebrated precisely because they are predicated on an underlying sense of difference and hierarchy, that of gender—with woman as the absent and inferiorized other. Such segregated celebrations of masculinity then help both in the reproduction of masculinity—through processes of 'remasculinization', in Jeffords' words—and in the limiting of masculinity to males (cf. Halberstam 1998). Existing differences of caste, class, age and so on between men can be erased (as with the erasure of racial and class difference in Hollywood 'buddy' movies) exactly because difference is projected onto women, allowing for a focus on what all men share (in contrast to women), and hence evocation of an imaginary egalitarian group—'men'. Extending Fuller's analysis about the posited superiority and independence of Brahmins being actually reliant upon their dependence upon inferiors (1992: 18) similarly, men's self-ascribed

superiority depends just as much upon complementary hierarchical relations with those who are constructed as social inferiors as it does on the very denial of connection with them.

At the same time, women are constructed as ever dependant on men's practical or mystical intervention, hence as substantially inferior (cf. Busby 2000: 227–9). For the whole year, the (spiritual and practical) well being of the Hindu household rests primarily on women, who visit temples regularly, who light the sacred lamp outside the house every day at dusk and who fast regularly. During the *mandala* period—the time of the Sabarimala pilgrimage—temples hold special daily *puja*s, *bhajana* (devotional songs) singing and seven- or nine-day-long public readings from religious texts, such as the Bhagavad Gita. During this period of intense devotional activity, the crowds attending temples are composed mostly of women. Yet it is the blessings accrued by men through renunciation and pilgrimage which are endowed with the special powers of promoting long-term household prosperity. These blessings come through immersion in a more potent and larger imaginary male body, a body at once connected to the masculine group, to the guru and to the hyper-male deity. They are blessings passed from men to women and to dependents: when returning pilgrims bring 'ladies' items' (gifts bought within the temple precincts); and when they distribute the deity's *prasadam* of honey balls, conscientiously gathered by men to take home. Predictably, women's quiet, continual spiritual work for the benefit of their families is overshadowed—and actually said to be activated and protected by—the more conspicuous ritual activities of men, that is the one-off or occasional act of all-male pilgrimage[16]. In other words, the Sabarimala pilgrimage—whose increasing popularity appears over-determined by current economic and political processes—(re)produces very modern (and politically inflected) ideal gender subjectivities: the all-powerful, heterosexual householder invested with the duty of providing for the spiritual and material well-being of the family, a task which sees women—as housewives and mothers—playing a complementary but—importantly—subordinate role. And yet, we observe that the hetero-normalization of masculinity advanced through the Sabarimala pilgrimage can never be, as all totalising projects, either complete or stable (cf. Ewing 1997; Mahmood 2004). Hyper-devotion to Ayyappan, embodied by the figure of the *guruswami,* can justify a permanent separation from the world of marriage and reproduction, a position that allows men to explore non-heterosexual alternatives from the safety of a culturally approved position.

In the next chapter, we will again think about worlds of homosociality and about the ways in which men's masculine status is not only asserted

against other men—in performance hierarchies—but is also, as in the Sabarimala pilgrimage, crafted out of bits and pieces of other men. Turning to think about young men, friendship and movie heroes, we will explore the production of masculinity through and with other men and through men's relationship with masculine fantasy figures.

Notes

1. This ritual gender segregation is reinforced by the existence of women-only temple festivals, such as Pongala at the Attukal temple in Thiruvananthapuram which every year attracts thousand of female devotees. This festival is popularly known as the 'women's Sabarimala'. We thank Mahalaxmi Mahadevan for reminding us of this.
2. On the origin of the temple there is another version of Ayyappan story that that goes like this: On returning with the tiger's milk and having realized the truth behind the task given to him and his divine origin, Ayyappan declines his father's plea to ascend the throne. Instead, he expresses a desire to retreat to the mountains. The king at last gives up and asks where exactly on the mountains he wished to reside. At this, Ayyappan shoots an arrow at the distant mountains and where it struck, a 'sannidhanam' (divine residence) was ordered to be built. We thank Mahalaxmi Mahadevan for this version.
3. This is food or other substances symbolically consumed by a deity and returned to the devotees imbued with the deity's grace and blessings (see Fuller 1992: 74-5).
4. The popularity of Sabarimala has been further enhanced since the advent of local cable television channels which, during the 2002–3 pilgrimage season, made daily live broadcasts from the temple itself (cf. Rajagopal 2001). Similarly, a number of Malayalam and English newspapers have started daily features on the pilgrimage during the Sabarimala season.
5. Although according to local informants Mahishi, the she-buffalo, should not be confused with Mahishasura, the male buffalo demon defeated and killed by the goddess Durga, we note striking thematic similarities between the two stories. In both cases, a deity's (sacrificial) killing of a male or female buffalo—with an explicit (Mahishasura) or implicit (Mahishi) demonic character or nature—engenders the rebirth/transformation of the latter into a servant-devotee of the slaying deity (see e.g. Biardeau 1984; Coburn 1988; Hiltebeitel 1989; Reiniche 1979; Tarabout 1986). Ayyappan's two 'helpers' are similarly transformed into devotees of the deity after their defeat (cf. Hiltebeitel 1989).
6. Valiyagramam is just 4 hours by bus from the river where the pilgrimage begins.
7. Alternatively, a *guruswami* might perform the rituals in the house of one of the pilgrims.
8. While villagers said that this was common in the past, in the 1990s it was performed by only a few.
9. Until the 1960s, the long route was the only one to Sabarimala, and remains popular among particularly devoted pilgrims or as a 'special' vow. The majority now arrive by bus or car directly to Pamba Nadi, following a new road built by the Kerala government along the Pamba river valley.
10. This coconut, writes Alex Gath in a recent study of the pilgrimage, 'used to be

broken on the holy eighteen steps which are ascended by pilgrims before reaching the main shrine. Since 1986, however, the steps have been decorated with a bright gold covering. Pilgrims are not permitted to break their coconuts on this but most do it off to the side, before ascending the steps' (1997: 160).

11. To avoid checking the flux of visitors, during the busiest days of the pilgrimage season, pilgrims are unceremoniously pushed and pulled up the narrow stairs by a line of policemen.
12. Every year the exclusion of mature fertile women from the pilgrimage gives rise to debates in newspapers and, occasionally, public protests. In 1990, for example, some male devotees complained to the Devaswom Board (the government body that administers Hindu temples in southern Kerala) about the posting of a woman as Special Commissioner for Sabarimala and her subsequent visit to the temple. The issue was picked up by a number of activist groups who argued that in fact all women should be allowed to participate in the pilgrimage. A protest outside the main Devaswom Board's office in Thiruvananthapuram was organized and court action was threatened. However, the ensuing public debate was soon overshadowed by the surfacing of a major scandal regarding the embezzlement of the temple's funds and corrupt practices in the tendering of contracts for the supply of provides to the temple. The issue of women's participation re-emerged in the following years and in 1996 the Devaswom decided to conduct a *devaprasanam*, an astrological diagnosis of a deity's wishes, to reach a decision on the matter. Predictably, the astrologer confirmed that Ayyappan would be displeased by the participation of women of child-bearing age. The verdict—which also dealt with other major issues such as the renovation, extension and development of new facilities for pilgrims at Sabarimala—was contested by some. They argued that it was invalid as it had been performed by an astrologer who had no customary rights in the Sabarimala temple and hence they organized their own *devaprasanam*. Eventually, a political compromise regarding the proposed developments was reached, but the *status quo* was upheld regarding women's participation. Ayyappan is a very popular and powerful deity and hence women are just as eager as men to go on pilgrimage. However, our experience suggests that by and large women accept that it would be a sin (*dosham*) for non-menopausal females to participate, as it would have a deleterious effect on the deity's powers.
13. The deferral of marriage or sexual union in order to preserve unique divine powers is a recurrent theme in many south Asian myths of the goddess (cf. Allen 1976; Fuller 1992; Sax 1991).
14. In northern Kerala, for example, there are many Muslim versions of the Ramayana written and performed according to the particular local *Mappilla pattu* style (Prof. M.N. Karassery, personal communication).
15. Islamic reformist critiques have accelerated recognition among Muslims that Kerala's secularist public sphere is in fact strongly marked as Hindu. As a result, amongst reformist organizations, relationships between communities are being reformulated as 'unity in diversity', under the protection of a secular state which is called on to guarantee the rights of religious minorities.
16. The Ayyappan myth also evokes an all-too-familiar theme of the transformation, taming, or containment of potentially dangerous, and yet powerful, unmarried females (here a she-buffalo; blood-thirsty goddesses in other stories) through the intervention of a male deity (see Fuller 1992: 199 ff.).

CHAPTER 8

Masculine Styles: Young Men and Movie Heroes

Introduction

In this final chapter, we return to thinking about young men—the 'boys' or *payyanmar* encountered in Chapter 2—and to the question that we opened with there: how to make a man? We have seen throughout this book that the status of 'man' is something closely tied in contemporary Kerala—as across south Asia—to marriage, fatherhood, house-ownership, providing and consumption. Yet throughout, we have also found that playing a masculine role or being admitted into an arena defined as masculine is not all there is to manliness. Masculinity here certainly also has a categorical flavour to it: a man is what a woman is not. The two realms of *aanu* (M) and *pennu* (F) are often drawn upon in discourse and energetically kept separate; how often we have heard the stereotypical statement, which apparently puts and end to all argument: 'men have moustaches and women have long hair'. But at the same time, masculinity is also deeply implicated in actual relationships between men and women. Here, sexuality and gendering are brought together as masculine and feminine are continually crafted through the structures and dynamics of heteronormativity. Anthropologists have long noticed the strong division made between 'sisters' and 'wives' in south Asia (e.g. Bennett 1983; Jamous 1991; Good 1991; Busby 1997). The critical distinction between the two women in a man's life is, of course, a sexual one. Sexuality and gender are yoked together, in that public claims to heterosexual status and doing identity work within a heterosexual frame are necessary for anyone's normative gender attribution (flirting, marriage). Still, masculine status is not guaranteed: performances of masculinity and repeated demonstrations of one's competence, assertions of place when

measured against other males, is clearly also crucial. Renewal and bolstering of masculinity via connectors with a 'greater masculine also comes into play. And if there is in the end no simple 'hegemonic masculinity' towards which all can aspire, there are still recognisably dominant and subordinate, successful and failed, normative and aberrant, mainstream and subcultural styles (cf. e.g. Brandes 1981; Walker 1988). And so here we turn finally to address more closely the question of style: of an aesthetics of masculinity and of the ways in which young men move through culturally nuanced masculine repertoires. Judith Butler stresses the need for reiterated gestures of gendering: in this chapter we think about the source of some of those gestures, and how they may be put together—brought in from outside onto the body, and then folded into the self. Such processes then do double identity work: they content onlookers and evaluators of a performance, permitting them to 'place' the performer as appropriately masculine; and they craft the subjectivity, the sense of self, of those who perform them. For, as Butler reminds us, we are our actions (Butler 1990).

In returning to our question, 'How do you make a man?' we choose here to focus on an arena of great importance: *cinema*. We will explore ways in which male movie stars (heroes) are important to young men who are beginning to stake serious claims to compete in masculine hierarchies. For lack of space, time and expertise, we are not taking an approach that has been common in cultural studies or film studies, and which would surely enrich our argument—looking at films and interpreting them as texts (this work is beginning to be done for Kerala by Muraleedharan, see e.g. 2002 and 2001). We will instead approach our subject from a classic anthropological angle, which intersects with cultural studies and film studies at the nexus of audience. Our focus is the audience—those who receive or subvert cinematic messages, who form relationships with the stars (whether in fantasy or actually) and with each other, mediated through cinematic modes of being or styles of doing. In discussing Malayalam *cinema*'s two major heroes and the attributes they are perceived to embody, we pick up the suggestion that mythic and religious figures (and hence, we add, stars) provide helpful anchor points for people doing identity work (see e.g. Roland 1988:253, 297; Kakar 1982:4; 1986: 114; 1989:135; Obeyesekere 1990). In line with other work on 'stars', we are then considering *cinema* as a modern arena analogous to myth, a forum for collective fantasy, which can act as a source of helpful orientations or archetypes (Gandhy and Thomas 1991; Derné 2000; Dwyer 2000:115ff)[1]. Stars are then particular nodes within that arena, dense points of transfer of desire, belief, self-affirmation or transformation and so on. Stars are also to be considered not only in

particular roles on specific films but more generally—following insights from media studies—intertextually, or across the broad range of arenas in which they appear—film, *cinema* magazine pin-ups, newspaper interviews, public appearances and so on (e.g. Dyer 1998; Gledhill 1991). Fans and fan activities actively contribute to these parallel texts (e.g. Jenkins 1990). But we will not be thinking of stars as 'role models' or, as suggested above in other analyses, as archetypes available for 'identification'. Rather, we will be pursuing the insights we have picked up this far in the book about masculinity as a partial, conflicted process: what we see is that young men take partial aspects of certain stars, shifting in the aspects they choose, making extempore performances of masculinity, which will never be exactly the same twice. And yet again in this chapter, we will feel the by now familiar pull between the homosocial world of friends, masculine pleasures, competitiveness and admiration and the demands of compulsory heterosexuality, which insists that young men eventually shift their performances outwards and address their masculinity towards a 'different' audience.

The importance of *cinema* in the cultural, social and fantasy lives of Indians is by now a taken-for-granted—if still relatively understudied and undertheorized—phenomenon (e.g. Kakar 1989:25ff; Dwyer 2000, Dwyer and Pinney 2001)[2]. Strong suggestions come from Indianist psychoanalytic literature that the process by which film becomes meaningful in a person's inner life is somehow specifically Indian, and is linked to a contextual sense of self, shifting identity and so on (see e.g. Kakar 1989:27; Roland 1991:253, 297). This view relies upon a distinction between solid bounded Western persons (normatively presumed to be internally stable) and fluid shifting Indian persons (who normatively need external anchors), but is contested by post-Freudian psychoanalytic analyses, upon which much 'Western' film theory heavily depends, which posits all selves as complexly configured and unstable. We hope that the stable and essentialized post-enlightenment subjects that have been assumed as a base in past analyses, which seek to draw strong distinctions between 'European' or 'Western' selves and their fluid Asian 'others' have been adequately demonstrated as fictive. While, as we argued in Chapter 6, the specific nature of the structures around infants and adults may well make for specific and different subjects, the issue of difference is a question of nuance, not gross otherness. No identities are in reality bounded and set once and for all, nor are they stable or internally consistent (see e.g. Kondo 1990; Gupta and Ferguson 1992).

While following up suggestions about the importance in identity work of the person of *cinema* in south Asia, we begin then from two core assumptions:

that Indian popular culture need not actually work very differently from that of the West, while Indian and Euro/North-American selves are equally shifting and multiple, such that to make a dichotomy between the uses of Indian and American cinematic forms is not helpful[3]. While allowing Gledhill's point about the 'separate identity' of other cinemas and the 'national specificity of Hollywood', still there remains something common in the ways in which *cinema* does its cultural/psychic work (1991). Popular Hollywood cinema also runs through familiar sets of moral dilemmas, fantasy situations and existential crises, while recurring stock characters such as the Autonomous Hero, the Teenage Rebel, the Bad Woman and so on are clearly discernible. Gananath Obeyesekere argues that we can use psychoanalytic theory in south Asia but need to understand that here symbol, fantasy, therapy, identity-work, may be experienced and played out differently from classical theory's expectations—notably, that they may be placed in a strong collective context of community and articulated against a different set of background goals (Obeyesekere 1982, 1990). Similarly, as we hope we have shown in Chapter 7, we do not need to reject outright either film theory or psychoanalysis, but can use them critically and in suitably modified forms. The very existence and viability in Western academics of the discipline of media studies confirms that cinema plays exactly the same strong role in people's fantasy lives in the U.S.A./Europe as it does in Asia. And at the same time, as Gledhill points out, in Europe/U.S.A., 'cinema still provides the ultimate confirmation of stardom' (1991:xiii). Although film theory's appeals to the tools of psychoanalysis have been heavily criticized (notably for working with assumptions of maleness and whiteness in its subjects), we continue to draw upon it, while at the same time retaining the right to take a sceptical stance on certain aspects of it. At the same time, we acknowledge the possibility that the grounds for fantasy life may be wider than those conventionally discussed. As Jayamanne and Eleftheriotis remark, critiquing unmediated uses of film theories developed in relation to Hollywood movies, the fantasy worlds crafted and the desires evoked may not be 'secret, guilty pleasures' of an individualistic and privatized sort (primarily concerned with issues of sexuality, gender and so on) but may also address other arenas—such as dreams of modernity (Jayamanne 1992; Eleftheriotis 2001).

For this chapter, we have undertaken interviews with film fans—male and female, young and older, from casual *cinema* goers to committed members of film star fan associations—watched Malayalam movies, looked at *cinema* magazines and collected many impressions about Kerala's *cinema* scene. While we have worked with fan clubs in the city, most of our background

material and understanding of the relevance of *cinema* and what we can call cinematic modes of being in daily life comes from our periods of rural fieldwork.

Cinema is important among all social groups: watching practice differs, such that day labourers are more likely than the 'middle-class respectable' to visit the cinema in town with wife and children as a treat, while those of higher status will hire videos/VCDs/DVDs to watch at home. Almost everybody stays home or visits TV-owning neighbours on Sunday afternoon to see the weekly Malayalam movie shown on regional public TV; wealthier villagers have access to cable and a richer variety of films. The TV market is expanding rapidly, such that anything we write will be immediately outdated. But the rise in access to cable TV and the decline in movie-going has not, we find, seriously diminished the importance among young people of movie and star/fan culture.

Malayalam cinema began in 1928, with the first talkie in 1938, and from its beginning has tended to draw not on theatre or mythologicals but on literature. There are just 475 permanent cinemas in Kerala (population around 60 million) and the average cost of making a single-starrer is around $ 200 000. While some film theory has drawn a distinction between melodramatic forms and narrative forms, tending then to figure the former as typical of south Asian and the latter as Hollywood styles, Malayalam cinema consciously works and claims to transcend such divides (as it claims also to move beyond the popular: parallel cinema break by producing quality mass films) in melding melodrama-style, song-and-dance formulas, stock characters and set-piece scenes, with strong plots and tendencies towards realism and 'interior' acting. As Jayamanne notes, following Gunning and writing on Sri Lankan family dramas, the emergence of modernist narrative modes in cinema does not purge out melodramatic aspects such as the spectacular. Indeed, melodrama itself contains narrativity, such that viewers find themselves attracted to stock characters and formal set-pieces (such as the death-bed scene) in a way which engages them and draws them into a story (1992:148).

Mammootty and Mohan Lal

Let us approach Kerala's stars via the Malayali disapora: take a trip to the large and long-established 'Kerala Org.' Website (http://www.kerala.org) and follow links for movies[4]. The picture galleries, interviews and film reviews make clear that despite the presence of several male stars or *heroes*, there are still only two major players in the industry—Mammootty and

Mohan Lal[5]. Even Suresh Gopi, who was mentioned to us by a (very) few field informants as favourite is often claimed to be a copy of Mohan Lal. Mammootty and Mohan Lal have been decried many times as has-beens ready to be supplanted by a new generation; yet somehow their appeal endures. While Lal's career has been in the doldrums Mammootty, although now over fifty and declared 'dead' several times over, has recently yet again defied predictions by drawing in huge crowds as the male lead in 'Rajamanickam'. Although Mohan Lal is the slightly higher paid (Rs 50 lakhs per film to Mammootty's Rs 35 lakhs) of the two megastars and generally the bigger box-office draw, Mammootty is widely accorded more respect for his acting abilities and has won more awards (five state and three national). There appears then to be a slight division of role. At the same time, we would argue that the two were throughout the 1980s and 1990s of equal status in Kerala, competing in the popular cinema market and each commanding a wide fan base. The 2000 Onam (Hindu festival) special edition of the weekly Malayalam magazine 'Cinema News' contains two full page colour 'pin up' photos: one each of Mohan Lal and Mammootty, with no other actor getting a look in. While Mammootty has more often ventured into 'art' or parallel cinema ('Vidheyan' ('The Servant'), 'Mathilukal' ('Walls'—which won prizes internationally and was released in Europe) and 'Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar'), Mohan Lal has also sought awards and international acclaim ('Kala Pani'; 'Vanaprastham' (issued in Europe as 'The Last Dance')); while Mohan Lal is frankly popular and populist, Mammootty's main work is also in popular *cinema* and his fan base is similarly broad.

Yet the pair, when we turn from Kerala Org's website and towards the closer focus afforded by fieldwork data, are not mere rivals, equal competitors for the crown of most popular Malayalam *cinema* hero—although this is sometimes how they are set up (notably, of course, in film magazines and by the more ardent members of fan clubs). They seem instead to embody different styles of hero and to have different types of appeal to audiences; sociologically, their fan bases trace slightly different social groupings. We find that fans and casual watchers pick up many points of alleged contrast between the pair, such that we enter into an economy of a proliferation of difference and of dispersal of the star persona to cover a vast realm and to permit different audience groups to enter into relationships with the stars at different registers. At the same time, undefined characteristics—'manliness', 'toughness'—are equally applied to both. So, what differentiates the two?

Mammootty often plays a Brahmin or high-caste Nayar; he is repeatedly

seen in uniform; he is also strong in 'family dramas' or 'sentimental films'. He made a string of highly popular crime movies in the 1980s ('CBI diary' series; 'Inspector Balaram') in which he played a sharp police inspector. He has famously played a military officer ('Nayar Saab'; 'Koodevide'; 'Kandukonden Kandukonden') and IAS officer ('The King'). Young male fans characterized him as taking roles for 'tough characters and family men, a person who is able to make decisions on his own'. He is good at playing repentant son, tragically widowed father, capable brother. Young male fans singled out as areas of especial virtuosity his abilities in playing 'elder brother', 'policeman' and 'Christian'. Lately, he has been famed for his sympathetic portrayals of widower/'second chance love' roles, in which he is both a mature (middle-aged) man and also romantic hero (e.g. 'Thomanum Mackkalum'). We can then see an aspect of Mammootty, which is his affinity with roles implying powerful and respectable men of status in control.

Mammootty embodies, performs and alludes to a familiar style of masculinity, attractive to both men and women. In Mammootty's picture gallery on 'Kerala Org' we repeatedly see him as man-of-action or phallic hero: in military or police uniform; cocking a gun; standing in 'hard' pose in vest and combat pants; pointing an accusatory and threatening finger into a co-actor's face; standing erect and aloof. If we see him at all with a woman it is often a screen mother, a grey-haired lady looking proudly at her son who finally, in mother's presence, permits himself a smile. He was identified to us by *cinema* watchers as 'manly'; 'even in roles in which he apparently begins as powerless, viewers know that the worm will surely turn'.

Mohan Lal began as a small-time villain or 'negative hero'—characterized by one informant as an 'angry young man'—who grew to stardom in the late 1980s[6]. His versatility was mentioned by many as a motivation for liking him: he is often perceived as able to 'do' violence, love, comedy, drama and so on, and is put forward by his supporters as a 'real' star, an actor who can constantly surprise his public and offer them new insights into his enormous talent. We heard several stories of his unexpected on-set improvisations in dance or *dialogue*, and one fan offered the interesting observation that, 'he has many different ways of smiling'.

These differentiated styles of masculinity are also, we must note, nuanced through class and ethnic styles. There is a clear status aspect to the two players' appeal: one fan based his preference for Mammootty on the fact that the latter is 'a gentleman': Mohan Lal is generally not considered anything like gentlemanly. In contrast to Mammootty's martial Nayars, Brahmin Police officers and powerful newspaper editors, Mohan Lal's

classic roles include auto-driver, would-be labour migrant, and fisherman. Mohan Lal is a Trivandrum man, raised and well-connected in the state's capital city: he is clearly identifiable as a Travancore (south Kerala) Hindu. While Mammootty's birthplace, connections and accent mark him out as a Cochin (central Kerala) man, his name marks him as a Muslim. As Eleftheriotis points out, writing of the difficulties of using existing film theory to analyse the heroes of Greek popular film, film theory's version of dominant masculinity and hence, the hero figure, has been rooted in silent premises of whiteness, of Anglo-ness, of certain positioning in relation to such things as technology or global class relations, despite theory's pretensions to globality. He finds particularly worrying film theory's failure to notice how its version of dominant masculinity as a 'preoccupation with order, power, control, mastery and domination' involves a 'blindness to issues of race', a failure to acknowledge its inherent whiteness. We need not necessarily accept here Eleftheriotis' consequent utter refusal to find relevance in film theory, because, working in south Asia we are privileged: post-colonial, post-partition local versions of masculinity are overdetermined by ethnicity and clearly understood to be so, such that sociological and historical analysis has long since been dealing as a matter of course with these issues. Indeed, issues such as the means through which south Asian masculinities have been expressed through race or ways in which Muslim-ness has been dealt with in film have been central to analyses of Indian social life and its representations (see e.g. Nandy 1988; Hansen 1996; Roy 1998). Scholars of the south Asian region know well that film theory's version of 'dominant masculinity' will not be appropriate, since we have for some time been studying exactly these questions of dominant, subordinate and abjected masculinities in India (e.g. Sinha 1985; Luhrmann 1996; Nandy 1983; Srivastava 1998). We will return later to think more about the implications of the two stars' ethnic and class identifications.

Mohan Lal is more of a song-and-dance man than Mammootty; the latter often appears uncomfortable in his singing scenes while, as even his fans admit, 'he can't do comedy …and no dancing!![7]' Even Mammootty's capacity to carry a romance scene is often criticized. His die-hard fans admit the criticism of Mohan Lal fans that Mammootty is not 'flexible', unable to cover Lal's range. And yet what is often mentioned by those who like Mammootty is his ability to evoke emotion, his skill in the particular niche which he has made his. This is sometimes linked by film-watchers with a commitment to a sort of realism, but we should note that (this being art and not life) the 'realism' of Malayalam *cinema* is still highly stylized and of a certain order. 'Realism' is used by fans to refer to an 'interior', restrained

style of acting: terminal illness, kind or cruel fate and romantic misunderstandings make their appearance as regularly as among Hollywood or Hindi films.

While Mammootty's 'hard man' roles endear him to teenage boys and younger men, his other strength—as powerful and capable family man—works especially well with mature women and in the family dramas for which he is equally noted (cf. Jayamanne 1992 on Sri Lankan 'family melodrama'). Commenting upon this, one Mohan Lal fan commented cynically, 'women like tough people', while several non-partisan *cinema* fans argued that women use *cinema* as a form of emotional release, and 'like/need to cry'. Mammootty's family tragedies provoke welcome tears and endear him to those older women who are looking in a hero for a competent mature man: a good father, a fascinating husband, a masterful figure in the family. Mohan Lal, meanwhile, is the more popular of the two among the younger, unmarried women: one young man argued that Mohan Lal must be more attractive to girls and women because he plays a 'maximum lover, like Marlon Brando', going beyond women's expectations based on their real-life menfolk. From a hypothetical female persepctive, if Mohan Lal then deals in pre-marriage romantic fantasies, Mammootty appears to trade in the grittier realities of negotiating family life after marriage and parenthood.

Many respondents thought that Mohan Lal was generally the more popular star among younger people, with Mammootty catering for 'older viewers', but we find plenty of young men among Mammootty's fans, contradicting another popular stereotype—that Mammootty is simply a 'women's actor'. Clearly, the subjectivities of *cinema* watchers are more internally complex than popular opinion imagines, such that any simple linear relationship of 'identification' or correspondence between star 'type' and fan 'type' cannot be made. As Jenkins notes, writing of U.S.A. Star Trek fans and their multiple identifications within a range of on-screen characters, 'identification with any one character or text is only momentary within the liminal play with identity that constitutes the filk (sic) song as a whole' (1990:157). We can understand these stars, then, not in any way as roles, types, or ideals; we need instead to understand how fans refer to highly specific characteristics or ways of reacting, or to moments in particular scenes in which the star appears in an especially satisfying way. We can also trace out some areas of specialisation or difference, listen to what fans tell us about their two heroes and try to understand ways in which Mammootty and Mohan Lal limit each other's horizons, playing out a dialogue within a broader scene of a range of cinematic 'types'.

As Gledhill writes, in her introduction to 'Stardom', on Hollywood,

'What emerges from these essays … is a new conception of identity as multiple, ambivalent, contradictory, always in the process of construction, but rarely dispensable' (Gledhill 1991). From this perspective, a simple one-off identification with either a star or a film character is unlikely, being unable to encapsulate the complexity of the gendered self. Malayali *payyan*s are caught between aspirations towards the glamour, violence and access to sex cinematically represented by villainy or ambivalent heroes and the possibility of behaving like the wholly good character. One would want to be able to practice—or imagine oneself—speaking like Mammootty, in a voice that resonates power, warmth and sensuality; one would want to imagine oneself as Mohan Lal, singing and romacing a girl; one would aspire to this one's swaggering gait, that one's expression of amused disdain. One wants to participate in Lal's 'average Malayali' alter-ego and in Mammootty's range of recognisable 'types' of dominant masculinity, the former's access to Hindu 'normality' and the latter's access to Muslim exceptionalness. And few of these potentialities could be dispensed with. Only if working class styles of masculinity are totally figured out in favour of a sober bourgeois orientation can some—not all—aspects of Mohan Lal's persona then be ignored—drinking, fighting, dancing. And even then, the associations called up by Lal's rejected activities—physical strength, male sociability, aggression, forcefulness—are still dealt with or traced by other means within the context of Mammootty's higher-status style: the police inspector with his legitimate gun replaces the *goonda* with his hastily grabbed weapon; the man of violence is only rendered such temporarily, generally by personal tragedy, which seeks solace in drink, with motivations explored in flashback and sometimes resolved in repentence and reform.

We are then thinking here not of identification but of temporary adoption and 'trying on'—or, better, 'taking in'—of characteristics, of partial and temporary incorporations into the self of such aspects as the smile, the walk, the deep voice[8]. During film-watching and the subsequent *ad hoc* mimetic performances that take place within the group—reciting *dialogues*, acting out fights, singing songs—*payyan*s are engaged in mimetic exchanges of characteristics with the stars, characteristics that are also then available to be detached from a particular hero and circulated within the wider group. In this identity crafting, fans can then be thought of not so much as identifying with their heroes as taking on parts of them, in processes that suggest the encounters of mimesis and alterity theorized by Taussig, in which the very fact that one is not striving to be an exact replica, but is instead fusing self and other, sameness and difference, is what is productive and potent, tinged with magical powers of transformation (Taussig 1997). Thinking of the

embodied nature of fan incorporation of star characteristics—remember that fans generally speak about a gait, a smile, a bodily disposition—also helps us overcome possible objections to or problems with psychoanalytic arguments about the fractured self, by enabling us to turn instead towards a less abstract concept with a long history of usefulness in theorising personhood: that of the dividual. No longer—since Strathern's work and its take-up by anthropologists working in various locations (Strathern 1988; cf. Busby 1997, 2000)—rooted in Marriott's original dichotomising of Western stable individuals and Indian fluid selves (Marriott 1990; see also Daniel 1984), the dividual enables us to think about the instability of the self and the ways in which aspects like gender are shaped.

Mammootty fans, asked to justify their preference, invariably make reference to their hero's physical glamour and artistry. Mammootty is respected for his art, his handsomeness and his speech. He is presented—negatively by detractors, positively by fans—as 'perfect': an actor who begins with a good physique, handsome face and thrilling voice, and adds to it linguistic talent—he does films in Tamil, Telugu and Hindi, undertaking his own dubbing—and 'serious' acting ability. 'He goes deep into a character and justifies the character'; 'He's prepared to change himself for a role'; 'You won't see him when you watch a film, just the character'; 'He is so skilled at serious expressions, when you see him as a policeman you'll feel as though you're looking at a real policeman'. Some fans believed that Mammootty 'just reads a script quickly and then improvises from his own imagination'[9]. In his alleged 'seriousness' or intellectualism and artistry he also, importantly, embodies an aspect of Malayali fantasy ethnic identity. Many Malayalis, in a state which proclaims 100 per cent literacy and a progressive outlook, like to differentiate themselves from 'illiterate and unclean' northerners and 'backward unworldy' other southerners. Malayalis hold strong aspirations towards modernity and development, and distinguish themselves from other non-metropolitan Indians by virtue of their proclaimed abilities to pursue these goals and act 'in pursuit of progress'—*progressinu vendi*.

Malayalam *cinema* is part of this modern self-identity, often proclaimed as 'different'—in avoiding the excesses of Hindi/Telugu movies and healing the split between 'art' and 'popular' cinema by having a popular *cinema* which is artistically valid[10]. If this were actually ever 100 per cent true, with films such as 'Harikrishnans' (a dual starrer new year festival release, which was unashamedly a star vehicle for both actors), Malayalam *cinema* has clearly been moving more towards populism and the styles favoured in Tamil or Hindi films. Still, we must allow a certain degree of difference,

affected for example by the predominance and popularity of 'realist' family dramas and the influence on film of literature (in a literate and media-savvy state). Most informants resisted any questions leading towards comparison of Malayali and other regional *cinemas*, and flatly refused to compare their two stars with those of other states: Kamal Hassan was grudgingly admitted as superior to Rajnikanth who was felt to be 'for illiterate people', while neither of these two Tamil stars were felt to come anywhere near the standard of Kerala's own two heroes.

Meanwhile, more than one Mammootty fan remarked scathingly (and unfairly, see e.g. 'Kalapani', 'Vanaprastham') that Mohan Lal can only take 'light' and 'masala' roles. Fans defend his flops by blaming them on poor script, direction and so on (as we would expect, from Srinivas 1996). Yet Mohan Lal is enormously popular among both young men and younger women, who will go to see him even in a film reputed to be bad, appreciating his ability—unlike Mammootty—to play the romantic and funny lover and to emote during love-song scenes. Young men admired his 'timing' in both comedy and in song sequences, claiming that although fat and not an agile mover, he dances rhythmically and 'naturally'. Some claim that whatever he does, 'you can see a rhythm in it'. Even Mammootty's staunchest fans admit that 'when he dances, it's ugly'; 'he has no flexibility'.

While Mohan Lal is said to have enormous 'talent' and 'screen presence', in contrast to Mammootty's 'artistry' in allegedly concealing himself as star within his acting role, the attraction of a Mohan Lal film was frankly claimed by many fans to be the prospect of, 'watching Mohan Lal for three hours, not the film'. One fan explained that, 'when you come out of the film you feel that you have spent time with someone very intimate to you—everyone feels like that with him'. If Mammootty can be attractive because of his artistry in making a convincing portrayal of something other than himself, Mohan Lal appears to be attractive by virtue of actually—apparently—being himself. 'You can't tell whether he's acting or not'; 'you don't feel that he's acting'; 'he's not actually acting, but behaving as he himself would in that situation'. 'Mohan Lal' then appears, in the manner of the older generation of Hollywood stars, to be perceived across contexts as consistent (Dyer 1998:20).

And if Mammootty represents an unapproachable but admirable ideal of perfection and mastery for his young male fans, Mohan Lal was claimed by most to be an everyman, a regular guy next door. Fans continually told us that in 'real life' Mohan Lal is terribly shy and a quite ordinary person, with no aura of stardom: only in front of the camera does he transform. 'You could not believe that this person is the same as the one on screen'. Those

who had met Mammootty reported a different experience, an encounter not with familiarity and frail mortality, but with unfathomable and majestic star quality. Those who had met Mohan Lal spoke of his ease at mingling with the public, and his willingness to take a drink. As Pramod Kumar puts it in Kerala Org's review of Lal's career, 'He is the alter-ego of the average Malayali'. Mammootty is characterized by detractors as less fallible and human than Lal, less approachable: he is said to maintain barriers between himself and his public (for example, keeping the public off-set at location shootings), while his public image as good Muslim and family man prevents him from being seen as a man one could offer to take for a drink with the lads. We have never heard him claimed, unlike Lal, as any sort of 'alter ego of the average Malayali'.

Fans actually revel in Mohan Lal's imperfections, a stance that is also attributed by them to the star himself. He is commonly, even by ardent fans, described as fat, bald (or with transplanted hair), unable to dance properly and so on. One group of fans recounted to us the disaster that followed his nose operation, which ruined his voice; another group pointed out that he walks with one shoulder lower than the other, but that this is seen as a charming imperfection, which others now imitate. Many scandals and malicious rumours have attached to him—that he had illicit affairs, that he was suffering from AIDS, that his wife is a drug addict. In his imperfections, he appears reassuringly human and 'one of us', in contrast to Mammootty's other-worldly perfection and apparent invulnerability. In drawing attention to Mammootty's uncanny perfection and Lal's struggles with his weight, his hair, his many imperfections, Lal's artistry then becomes magnified among those of his fans who like to claim that Mammootty's appeal is based entirely upon the latter's 'good voice, face and body'. When Mohan Lal partisans praise his artistry, it is naturalized as 'talent', an inborn quality, and contrasted to Mammootty's strained and forced pursuit of excellence via technique.

Moral ambivalance is another attribute called up by Lal's roles, a quality that resonates with young men who reject a cinematic dualism in favour of a more nuanced understanding of motivation and action. Asking about Lal's best films, we were often referred to roles in which he begins as a frank rowdy (*goonda*) before transforming into a negative hero; in which he begins as innocent but is forced by circumstance into a violent lifestyle; or in which he 'wins in the end without having to become good' ('Kiridam', 'Chengol', 'Devasuram', 'Vyarangil', 'Aranthamburan'). Some fans compared him to Amitabh Bachchan in his ability to represent people, 'reacting to life in a way that you would like to do, but don't'. Others noted that he is excellent

at portraying a 'hard drinking man'. The film that most agree catapulted him into stardom was 'Rajavinde Makan', in which he played an underworld don. Fans spoke warmly of a series of films in which Mohan Lal essentially repeated his role or played the same character but from slightly different angles—the *goonda* who is also benevolent or kind to the poor and downtrodden ('Devasuram', 'Aramthamburan', 'Usthad', 'Spadikam'). Lal's moral ambivalence is another means of crafting intimacy with young men, while Mammootty's taking of the moral high ground (in film as in public persona) removes him from the plane of the ordinary, the fallible, making him less accessible to many.

Older *cinema* watchers, notably married women, offer a different view of Lal, seen to be still haunted by his early days as villain and judged negatively for his populism. For this group, Mohan Lal represents the basest and worse aspects of Malayali-ness, those parts of Kerala culture which seem to challenge the modern aspirant values of respectability, intellectualism and sophistication. If Lal is indeed the 'alter-ego of the average Malayali', then that Malayali is being elided with a lower- middle-class or working class (probably) Hindu male, a point to which we shall later return. One married middle-aged female librarian, disparagingly referring to Mohan Lal as 'chappatti face', dismissed him as 'Fat and ungainly', while complaining that his films held no interest for her, being, 'Just *dishum-dishum*' (violence).

The Fan Clubs

We now move to consider the activities of fan clubs and to hear what hard-core moviegoers have to say about their heroes.

Fan clubs or associations are an India-wide phenomenon (see e.g. Srinivas 1996; Rogers 2005). In Kerala they tend to be neighbourhood based, with each locality having its own chapters of the Mammootty and Mohan Lal associations or local fan clubs, which are affiliated to the all-Kerala umbrella. City clubs, the most organized and active, meet regularly—often daily—in public spaces and offer space for sharing movie or star talk, general socialising and the undertaking of a range of wider activities. Minimally, the associations drum up support for films with 'their' star; they put pressure on cinema owners not to withdraw films just before significant anniversaries (such as '100 days'). As with other 'street' activities, membership in a fan association is not an option for girls or young women, but is confined to males. Most young men drop out of active membership after marriage and certainly by the age of thirty. The picture as regards membership and activities is very similar to that described by Dickey (2001)

and Rogers (2005) in Tamil Nadu.

True to the differentiated images of their heroes, those young men who choose to take fandom a stage further by joining a star association split themselves roughly into differentiated groups. We say roughly because in Kerala, unlike other states, fandom is not a matter of rivalry, political partisanship or even life and death (cf. Srinivas 1996; Pandian 1992; Dickey 1993, 2001; Rogers 2005). Many fans criticized the producer of the dual-starrer, 'Harikrishnans', for producing two endings, to be shown in different regions, allowing both stars to 'get the girl' in the final reel, where she—unable to decide—tosses a coin. Yet others told us that the original print had shown Mammootty as the successful suitor, and that it was after considerable press and fan protest that the director had hurriedly spliced in an extra shot allowing a version in which Mohan Lal wins.

While there is then a 'hard-core' central group who remain partisan and always committed to 'their' star, ready to protest should he appear—as in 'Hariksrishans'—to lose out, in general young men frequently shift associations and change allegiances. And what is interesting is that this is not thought disloyal or inconsistent; it is understood that the balance between the stars will change over time; as new films come out one might move into ascendancy and take fans with him into his association, only to see them switch to the other association when a good film with the other star comes out and draws fans in. Efforts have been made within the industry to maintain this harmonious state: the star Prem Nazir is credited by fans with having laboured towards harmony by making it commonplace to take cross-communal roles, working against crystallisation of any one star with one community or one political affiliation, deliberately breaking up the star's intertextual consistency in these arenas (contrasting strongly with neighbouring Tamil Nadu, see Pandian 1992). Mohan Lal and Mammootty have often appeared together in films ('Madras Mail'; 'Adimagal'; 'Naanayam'; 'Harikrishnans') and often make public appearances or photo-calls together. Recently, they have been engaged together as business partners in setting up a Malayalam TV channel[11]. This lack of partisanship fostered within the industry may also develop spontaneously: as Jenkins points out (writing on Star Trek fans), many fans find their initial attachment to a particular character or TV programme serves as 'point of entry into a broader fan community', drawing them into a wider culture of fandom in which many stars and programmes are appreciated (1990).

Still, as we have suggested, while the majority of the general population will happily watch films with either star in and while even fan club members may shift sides, most cinemagoers do argue for a differential appeal between

the two styles. We certainly found obvious social differences in fan club membership. In one city, the Mammootty fan club was composed mostly of respectably employed or college-going young men in their mid to late 20s. The secretary—like several members—is a Muslim, while club membership is fairly mixed community-wise. This group meet each evening on the steps of a temple to talk and plan activities. The Mohan Lal club met in the rougher public space of a teashop and often retired from there to a drinking club for beer and non-vegetarian snacks. Members of this association tended to be younger (from mid teens) and Hindu, with a few Christians and very few Muslims, and of a more heterogeneous class background. Some branches of the Mohan Lal club exist in the poorest squatters' neighbourhoods among the 'roughest' of young men. Overall, both group's memberships correspond to the 'active fan' sociological profile outlined by Srinivas: the same sections of society—but, crucially, not the same people—who are active in party politics (the lower-middle classes/working classes) also become active in fan associations (Srinivas 1996; but see Rogers 2005 for a discussion of the linkage between fan club activities and mainstream poilitics in Tamil Nadu). Those from professional and very high-caste/class backgrounds tend not to be involved.

Members of fan clubs make it a point to see a star's new movie (often more than once) in the first few days, generally as group outing and taking seats with block bookings. From this early viewing, they undertake to spread the word about the film by word of mouth and encourage others to go and see it. They also give feedback to the star about their reactions to the film and reported to us that the stars listen and take on board fan reaction—as they probably do, since success depends ultimately on popular support (see Srinivas 1996 on the power exerted over Andhra star Chiranjeevi by his fan associations). Mohan Lal fans—young men, remember, who are under elders' watchful eyes at home—clearly relished the power and autonomy open to them as members of the association, seen for example in the opportunity at 'first showings' to turn a public space for a while into a space of their own. 'No decent people would attend a premiere' remarked one fan laughingly, referring to the shouting, clapping and drinking that goes on during such occasions.

A key feature of both associations is to raise money and distribute it to charitable organisations (cf. Dickey 2001). Young men stressed the social service which they carry out, giving us photographs of activities carried out 'in the star's name'. Mohan Lal's association—formed in 1983 and reconstituted in 1996 as an all-Kerala umbrella for local fan clubs—states its aims as dual—'cultural and welfare activities' and it participates, for

example, in sponsoring mid-day meals for the poor at an underfunded local rehabilitation project, organising fans to donate blood, or giving out free tickets for Mohan Lal's films to old age homes and orphanages. The Mammootty Association was formed in 1983, with the scope, according to one fan, of, 'the worship of Mammootty'. Some claimed that Mammoottty had wanted nothing to do with fan activity but, realising the potential for good, had requested the association to reformulate itself, which it did in 1996, into a dual fan and welfare society with the twin aims of (1) publicising/promoting Mammootty's films; (2) charitable work. Mammootty's fans state honestly that it was at his suggestion rather than their own intiative that they expanded their scope to include welfare activities, and affirm that he 'believes in charity'. Special days such as the star's birthday are celebrated—in Mammootty's case, in recent years with pledges for eye donations, distribution of clothes to the poor and construction of a bus shelter; among Mohan Lal's fans, with a party at an orphanage honoured by attendance of someone from the film industry and distribution of food and sweets to 'all 350 residents' (cf. Rogers 2005).

We here turn to a comparison with Lott's analysis of Elvis fans and impersonators (1997). Elvis and Malayalam film fans echo each other's words in stressing firstly the importance of charity work and secondly that it is all done in the name of the star. We can, we think, apply here Lott's interpretation, that fans have an impulse to 'working class mutuality and solidarity' and are concerned in the use of the monies they raise with 'human connection', 'real needs, not just money' (Lott 1997:218). This desire for human connection and solidarity cannot be met by making cash donations, but embodies itself in the complex arrangement and execution of what we can—without diminishing them—call masculine performances of solidarity, as in projects like mass feeding of the poor. Another aspect of this charity work is raised by Lott's assertion that fans wish to be able to bestow the same 'sudden extraordinary gifts of which Elvis was capable'. One fan told us a story of seeing Mammootty giving Rs 50 to a beggar; the association's birthday distribution of clothes to the poor follows a similar logic of benevolent largesse. In a photograph given to us by one Mohan Lal fan club of a mass feeding they had undertaken, lines of weary festival-goers at the time of Thiruvananthapuram's great Attukal Devi goddess festival sit patiently waiting on the floor as fan association young men—on their feet and active, protagonists of the situation—ladle out free rice and curries. The photograph reminds us of Lott's remark about 'the propensity of working class men to … enact[ing] rituals of self-assertion and imaginary beneficence' (213), while reminding us that the beneficence is not always

imaginary.

Again, the star makes possible positive identifications with the self—in Mohan Lal's case especially, a self who is working class and in solidarity with the poor, or in Mammootty's case a solidly bourgeois self who is a generous patron. The star also permits, via fan activity, magical transformations of the self—an unexpected opportunity to distribute largesse like a high-caste wealthy patron; the possibility that through involvement in the fan association and its work one might participate in the star's power and reach. The extended and enhanced sense of masculine self achieved by fans brings us on to think more closely about how issues of gender and power are configured within fandom, within relationships to stars, around the figures of stars themselves, and by virtue of membership of a powerful association.

Young Men and Movie Stars

Visiting the theatres in town once or twice a week, paying Rs 10–30 to see mostly Malayalam and occasionally Hindi or Tamil movies, *payyanmar* (young men) study the film heroes/villains and try to copy their clothes, hairstyles, slang and mannerisms. Whole portions of *dialogue* (*sambhasanam*) are learnt off by heart, as are the songs; a 'good' film will be seen several times by those with access to money. Because of friends' discussions, film magazines and radio, all boys, even those with little money, are familiar with at least the plot details, songs, catchphrases and fashions of the latest film. Regular group outings to the *cinema* is the major social activity for younger men, who have neither the money nor have yet arrived at a stage in life where a trip to the bar—many older men's preferred social outing—is appropriate. The content of films also provides them with important reference-points in relation to their lives and aspirations.

In some societies with no formal rites of passage towards adulthood, heterosexuality can become the cornerstone of an imagined gender stance, such that evidence of attraction to women becomes evidence of 'manliness' (Brittan 1989:18; Rich 1980). Queer studies writers are the latest in a line of gender theorists to point out the pernicious effects—for politics and sociological analysis alike—of taking for granted this common-sensical but inappropriate and empirically inaccurate elision between sexual object choice and gendering (e.g. Caplan 1987:20ff & Weeks 1987, both in ed. Caplan; Peterson 1998:96ff; Halberstam 1998). In any case, in their relative lack of interest in female stars and turn towards male stars, we feel that Kerala's young men are playing out an approach towards gendering which is not simply grounded in 'hierarchic heterosexuality' (following Brittan

1989). To be sure, as we have argued in Chapter 5 and 6, heterosexual activity is present and plays a part in making gender, but in the realms of shared fantasy and cultural life, we would argue strongly that young men's tentative (and illicit, difficult) relationships with young women lack the substance of their relationships with each other and with their male movie heroes. The heterosexual matrix here is very strongly tempered by, and runs in a certain tension against, the categorical foundations of south Asian gendering, which leads to segregation and homosociality.

Some methodological problems in gender analysis need to be raised here. Most problematically, we need to address the vexed question of desire; much film theory and some gender studies has explored and problematized desire to the extent that it takes for granted some degree, for example, of homosexual desire in men's watching of men on film. We have - after much discussion and argument, by no means resolved, between ourselves—decided to accept a cautious version of this line in the paper, so that when we find young men talking of the physical attractiveness of the stars to women, or hypothesising the reactions among girls to the stars, we talk of homoeroticism. We remain acutely aware of possible objections to or criticisms of taking such a perspective. One might, for example, argue that the situation here is more one of homosociality than homoeroticism, and that the two should never be confused. We might then counter-argue that the homosexual desire present here is self-evident both from the boys' talk, from the very position of the star as object of desire, and from what both psychoanalytically inclined gender and film theories have taught us about the ways in which—universally—we as humans form our gendered subjectivities and are attracted and respond to each other and to various fantasy figures.

On the other hand, it might be argued that we cannot transpose theories based upon desire and stressing sexuality to contexts outside of the sexualized and desire-driven north Atlantic context; a local theory of desire and attraction might serve better to understand motivations—and we must then ask of course, can we identify one? And would it be terribly different from a European one? Recent work suggests that while the forms of attraction, styles of sexual practice and relations between gender and sexuality may be quite specific, the core fact of the existence of currents of desire, attraction and sexuality are certainly present (e.g. Dwyer 2000; Cohen 2005; Dell 2005; Reddy 2005). And again, we could counter the counter arguments against thinking in terms of desire and assuming the presence of homosexual desire or recognition of attraction as being standard ones born of the unconscious self-protective motivations of the carefully

bulwarked and totally constructed non-natural heterosexual self. If we take seriously the vast body of academic work on gender and sexuality, from whatever perspective it is written, we would find it very hard to refuse to admit a homosexual component to all desiring selves: why then refuse blankly to see it when it appears to stare us in the face? As Rachel Dwyer notes, reviewing literature on stars, 'Questions about the homoerotic pleasures of cinema and the reason that many people prefer stars of the same sex are also left open', (2000:117). We have been quite surprised by the vehemence of most of our academic colleagues, who have taken (often indignant) exception in public presentation of this material to any suggestion that there may be elements of homoeroticism—never mind outright queerness—in young men's relationships with stars and each other. Indeed, Muraleedharan's eminently reasonable point that 'heterosexual and straight-identified people experience queer moments' does not appear to be taken at all for granted within academic discourse outside of gender and queer studies (2002:182). It is interesting that in a radically deconstructivist intellectual climate in which academics acknowledge the artificiality of race and gender, (and even now biological sex), 'heterosexuality' still appears to be unquestioningly essentialized and naturalized. For the moment then, we bow to the mainstream in this chapter in keeping the 'homosocial' and the 'homosexual' apart, even as we interrogate that mainstream on its staunch refusal to countenance the existence of the warp of queerness alongside the weft of everyday 'normal life'.

We are then being careful here to maintain distinctions and draw lines between homosociality, homoeroticism and homosexuality. Still, while always mindful of the possible dangers of using high theory to evaluate local cultures, we take our lead from Muraleedharan's recent delightful queer reading of the Mohan Lal star persona and his justifications for doing so. If a local (Malayali) writer feels that homosexual desire can be read into films—indeed, he goes further to assert that in particular, 'Mohan Lal films recurrently negotiate male-male desire, imagined in both physical and emotional terms' (2002:189), it would be wilfully antagonistic to deny the possibility of such an interpretation[12]. We can think then of Mohan Lal and Mammootty as vessels of desire in its very widest sense.

At the same time, we can take up the insights explored in Chapter 6: that equality and friendship between men can be celebrated and performed precisely because it is predicated upon a deeper sense of difference and hierarchy—that of gender, with woman as the absent and abjected other. This segregated celebration of masculinity, which then helps in masculinity's reproduction and in the limiting of masculinity to males[13] would apply

equally to the male-male bonds portrayed on screen—the stars' on-screen friendships and sidekicks; to the fantasy male-male bonds forged in the cinema darkness—between male viewer and on-screen hero; and to the male-male bonds built up within fan clubs and social activities around cinema-going. Again, the relative absence of women from cinematic arenas is relevant here: remember that Malayali *cinema*—unlike Hindi counterparts—does not have female stars; that girls and women participate less strongly in cinema-going and *cinema* culture; and that females are entirely absent from fan clubs and fan activities. More than a mere absence of women, the community of males appears to be reproduced and defined here in a belligerent opposition to women, as young men aggressively embody and mimetically perform hyper-masculinity in the space they take as their own and make uncomfortable for young women—the street. Kajri Jain notes, 'I remember vividly (… because of the sense of vulnerability it engendered in me, as a relatively well-off young woman), the way in which young men and boys on the streets adopted Bachchan's hairstyle, clothing, stance, 'attitude' and gestures, punctuating their Bachchan style fights with the obligatory *dishum-dishum* sound effects …' (2004: 332).

One effect in Kerala of *cinema*-related activities is to provide adolescent and post-adolescent boys with a safe segregated social space in which they can socialize, share information, try out their fledgling masculine identities and grapple with the demands of their emerging sexualities. This may be especially important among middle-community youths: remember that those from the poorest labouring families are drawn early into paid work and at least a contributory masculine 'breadwinner' role, while high-caste Hindu Brahmin young men undergo a formal rite of passage towards adult manhood (the *upanayanam* sacred thread ceremony), but middle community young men face an extended 'youth' and an unclear situation regarding their position in the hierarchical worlds of gender and maturity. As we argued in Chapter 5, in the absence of external structures or validation for their passage towards manhood, boys turn inwards to the peer group in competitive and often exaggerated performances of masculinity (cf. Jackson 1990:168ff; Murphy 1983: 388).

The Malayali refusal to countenance genuine rivalry between the two stars, and the common phenomenon of switching or sharing allegiance, confirms that both Mammootty and Mohan Lal are necessary in a full fantasy life. Young men need to maintain access to the full complexity of the range of characteristics embodied by the pair as a 'set' covering masculine possibilities. Some informants mentioned that in pre-1980s *cinema* one major male star used to cover roles now differentiated between Mammootty and

Mohan Lal. Most acknowledge that by now the range of roles and the development of Mammootty and Mohan Lal's respective repertoires means that no one star will ever again be able to encompass all the subtleties and complexities afforded by an enjoyment of both actors' films. Mammootty fans sometimes refuse to see any potential candidate for taking on the mantle of physically perfect character actor, which only Mammootty embodies. Meanwhile, one Mohan Lal fan modestly characterized his hero's famous 'range' as really coming down to just 'romance, comedy and action'. This then leaves out genuinely serious drama or family roles, which is where Mammootty of course excels. As one cinema-owner remarked, 'Both actors will be accepted by audiences, but they do tend to be role-specific'. While fans may then engage in rhetorics of dismissing the 'other' star, in practice they acknowledge the partial nature of their favourite's abilities and are actually almost always film fans in a more general sense, who enjoy movies per se, and who have fan relations to the stars that are not exclusive.

The relative elaboration of male over female stars is also relevant here: young men might, we could imagine, (and following Brittan, above, on hierarchic heterosexuality) choose to focus on female 'pin-ups'. That they do not do so[14] testifies to the enormous double power for young men of the male star: he is able to act both as object of desire—(for those negotiating heterosexual identities, in a transformed, disguised or displaced homoeroticism as we often find in Hollywood cinema)—and as vehicle for youthful aspirations. In a classic and much cited early article, Laura Mulvey identified two distinct modes for male viewers of looking in cinema—one located in female stars who are there to be looked at with desire and one located in male stars who provide figures for identification (Mulvey 1975). Neale, discussing 'masculinity as spectacle', challenged this dichotomy by alerting us to ways in which 'the narcissistic male image—the image of authority and omnipotence—... can involve an eroticism, since there is always a constant oscillation between that image as a source of identification and as an other, a source of contemplation (Neale 1993:13[15]). Outside of cinema, Lott also argues that the figure of Elvis acts in both ways, simultaneously 'fetishized object … of fascination' and 'the ideal ego they [fans] seek to inhabit or even replace'. We follow Lott's insight to note, with him and also following Holmlund's reading of the appeal of Stallone, that the two forms of pleasurable looking cannot actually be so clearly demarcated and can certainly not be assumed to be so easily elided into a simplistic dichotomous gender model: while stars themselves may slip between the two modes, a viewer—of either sex—can easily simultaneously want both to be and to have the star (Lott 1997:200; Holmlund 1993; cf.

Jenkins 1990:157).

Let us turn more closely to the frank pleasure taken by some young male viewers in their male stars. If we follow queer theory in delinking desire from identity and in insisting upon the recognition that ‘heterocentric texts may contain queer elements’, while ‘straight-identified people experience queer moments’ (Muraleedharan 2002:182), then young men’s pleasure and ability to slip into different imagined subject positions may be indicative of fluidity in gendered subject positions, of fluidity in choice of desire-object, or of both. When young men talk about the ways in which Mammootty arouses emotion in women, Mohan Lal’s smile evokes desire and overcomes resistance in women, or when they express pleasure is seeing their heroes’ bodies displayed on screen, we cannot say whether this suggests young men’s ability to imagine themselves as the masterful star, their ability to slip into the imaginary position of female spectator taking pleasure from the man, or their ability to feel and possibly accept a homoerotic pull, a tug of longing towards the star. Rather than try to fix the ways in which pleasure and attraction might be flowing here, then, let us simply insist upon keeping things open and at least allowing, following Muraleedharan, the possibility of a queer reading of fan phenomena (2002)[16].

Mammootty fans were most explicit about their hero’s role as masculine object of veneration and desire: ‘He fulfils our imagination of a real man in his body and his voice’; ‘he has a very good body and is physically fit’; ‘he is the ideal man’; ‘he’s a complete man’; ‘he is handsome to us young people’; ‘he’s very good at doing masculine characters’; ‘he’s very good at playing positions of power’. Mammootty is an acknowledged target of fantasies about manhood and manliness. A possible homoerotic aspect of fans’ relationship, already suggested by the way in which they tend to dwell upon Mammootty’s physique and handsomeness, is further hinted by the apparent ease with which young men slip themselves into the minds of imaginary womenfolk to talk about what makes Mammootty so attractive to women. One fan confidently asserted, ‘Mammootty is more popular among women because he is the perfect man’; another echoed a familiar opinion ‘especially older women like a strong and decisive man’. Fans spoke appraisingly of Mammootty’s roles in women-pleasing ‘family dramas’ such as ‘Pappayude Sondham Appus’, in which Mammootty plays a widower who, in the words of fans, ‘gives both mother’s and father’s love to his child’ with the result that women seeing the film ‘cried a lot’. Mammootty is credited with the ability to arouse strong emotion *in women*. This location of the strong emotion among women, who occupy a gendered space which is a conventional locus for emotional outlet, preserves the local equation making

emotion the province of the uncontrolled, i.e., not mature men. At the same time, easy talk of Mammootty's appeal to women and appreciation of his ability to portray and evoke tears makes it clear that the performance is widely esteemed and the appeal shared cross-sex.

While the decidedly physically imperfect Mohan Lal would apparently less easily move into the position of object of homoerotic desire, still fans are able to appreciate aspects of erotic attraction in him[17]. For Mohan Lal fans, the critical thing—sweeping aside the bad hair, skin, nose and so on—is the actor's smile. 'When you see that smile, you'll fall in love with him', asserted one (male) fan (speaking to Filippo). Another agreed that, 'his smile is his real weapon'. Fans also told us that 'Vanitha' women's magazine had even printed his photograph with the caption 'Krishna's thieving smile', associating him to the playful and sensual god Krishna and turning his smile, as in the above male fan's description of it as 'weapon', into a means of aggression or cheating, via seduction.

One point of permitting a queer reading of the relationship between fan and star is that it also enables us to think about the importance of contact. Contact—whether actual or magical, as in the darkened cinema space—enables us to draw together two interesting perspectives on personhood: Michael Taussig and McKim Marriott. A central plank of both Taussig's hypothesized 'mimetic power' and the ability of Marriott's dividual's to transfer qualities between people is contact. Marriott's concept of the 'dividual' is more useful, in its specificity, than more vague ideas of a fragmented or unstable self. Marriott originally proposed the 'dividual' as standing opposed to the 'individual'. This was a uniquely south Asian type of self said to stand in contrast to Euro–American stable individuals (1959, 1976). We are here using the concept and finding it useful in the sense in which it has recently been expanded and picked up outside of south Asian contexts, as a way of thinking about all selves: partible, fluid, in flux and in continual processes of exchange with others, whereby characteristics are transferred between people (Marriott 1990). What is especially useful about the dividual is that it is right from the outset a fully corporealized self, not an abstract consciousness nor a self in which the mind, soul and body can ever be separated. As becomes clear when it is used in analysis, beginning from the concept of people as 'dividual' encourages us to perceive the ways in which a body—the imagined 'natural'—is unstable, is crafted and is subject to the influence of others (see e.g. Strathern 1988; Osella 1993; Busby 1997; Freeman 1999; Osella and Osella 2000b). Thinking through dividuality with regard to gender points up, by contrast, the processes by which contemporary gender categories have been crafted and now come to seem

stable and true: for since the late 19th century and the flourishing of colonial science, south Asia has been just as implicated as Europe in epistemologies which insist upon science as truth, biology as clear cut, bodily sex as part of nature and so on (Laqueur 1987; Jordanova 1989). Acknowledging the ideological loadedness and inaccuracy of these common-sense understandings, we can find in dividuality a more helpful descriptive metaphor for how gendering works: it is processual, uneven, shifting and plural; and it is deeply embedded within bodily styles.

The embodied nature of the gendered self is critical for us: it is in the ways we make our second skins—with dress, cosmetics, hair and so on—and in the ways we perform our gendering, through gestures and movements, that others attribute gender to us and judge our performances successful—or not. When young men look to movie stars, they do not simply admire, but mimetically embody stars' attributes and bodily styles; the magic of *cinema* allows the fantasy of contact. As Taussig argues, the magical power—the transformative potential—of mimesis lies in the heady combination of magical contact and copying.

For Taussig, mimesis is not a simple copy, but a fusion of self and other whose power is predicated upon contact with the original (Taussig 1993, 1997). The mimetic self is not then simply a 'one' who copies an 'other' to become a doubled self—original self plus copy of other: rather, it is a self in magical contact with and utterly imbricated in another. For Marriott, a dividual or partible person is subject to absorption or transfer of qualities from others, and depends for the illusionary wholeness of its fantasy self upon the incorporation of aspects of others (Marriott 1990). More than distant admiration (the wanting to be), theorising a relation between fan and star as the wanting to have—as a desire for intimate contact—expresses the transformative possibilities engendered by that magical cinematic contact, where one can assume that the deeper and more intimate the contact, the greater the possibility of transferring qualities.

Fans are most explicit about their recognition of an attraction towards stars based upon their 'manly qualities'. Here the qualities put forward are not connected to physical beauty or characteristics but to modes of action specifically coded as masculine, such as autonomy or forcefulness. Mohan Lal is admired for his roles in which he drinks hard, fights readily and successfully and cuts decisively through bourgeois scruples and conventional moralities to 'react …to life in a way that you would like to do, but don't'. Mammootty was similarly characterized by fans as appealing because of his ability to 'fulfil in movies ambitions that people have but can't realize'. We need now to think a little more now about the masculine value of 'action'

and its close relative—in movies at least—violence.

Mammootty—real name Mohammed Kutty—is actually a Muslim, a fact often mentioned by young male fans[18]. Muslims—a Kerala minority population—are widely stereotypically associated by Hindus and Christians with violence, sexuality and aggressive masculinity. They are said to be quick to anger, quick to react to slight or threat: proud and emotional[19]. Mammootty is then perhaps especially useful to young men looking for a phallic/potency figure in which to participate. In any case, Mammootty allows young non-Muslim men to experience a fantasy relationship with a powerful mature Muslim man, a fascinating other. That he comes from the minority community coded (by Hindu and Christian alike) as utterly 'other' in Kerala (as right across India, e.g. Roy 1988; Gupta 2002; Hansen 2001; Ansari 2005) adds a twist. This type of twist has been well explored in analyses of white—hence dominant—Anglo masculinities (e.g. Mailer, cited in Back 1994; Lawson 1990; cf. Lott 1997 on the 'blackness' of Elvis and other white working class heroes). Working class Hindu masculinity, while at one level defined in opposition to the Muslim other, at another level actually relies upon an incorporation of aspects of masculinity (such as decisiveness or readiness for violent action) especially associated in the cultural landscape of ethnic stereotype with Muslimness[20]. This argument is bolstered when we turn to the style of masculinity enacted by Mohan Lal, the populist star who stands in contrast to Mammootty's elite style and attracts a younger and slightly more proletarian and more Hindu following. Violence—generally understood in Kerala as an essentialized (stereotyped) characteristic (*gunam*) of Muslims in opposition to stereotypes of Hindu passivity[21]—is one of Lal's mainstays. Over and over he has played the *don* or *goonda* figure. Just as Lott argues that white audiences gain access to black practices without having to acknowledge their relationship with actual black people by means of a relationship with a white star who enacts attractive aspects of blackness, Mohan Lal, in a more indirect and hence 'safer' way than Mammootty, enables young male audiences to access the phallic power embodied in Muslim 'aggression' and 'propensity for violence'—as in many cultural contexts, characteristics which are in Kerala actually a necessary part of young Hindu and Christian men's experiences of masculine power. This parallels Jain's analysis of calendar art portrayals of Hanuman and Ram, and the processes by which bodybuilding-style muscularity became acceptable in north India, largely through the art-work of P. Sardar, a Muslim artist and bodybuilder: as she wryly notes, 'what is reproducible about Sardar's body is his muscularity, rather than his Muslimness' (2004:315).

Turning from violence to romance—from masculinity as dominance to masculinity as performance aimed at claiming the centre of attention and at attracting women—we should return to the question of dancing (important in that all Malayali popular films are musicals), where we find a sharp contrast marked out. Mohan Lal is admitted not to be a skilled dancer but is claimed as 'rhythmic', 'flexible', and as improvising moves in a naturalistic way; Mammootty is rigid and inflexible and actually prefers to maintain stillness than to move at all. During musical numbers we often find him taking on the role of the appreciative observer, sitting in a chair while a woman dances for him; or standing pensively/moodily looking into the distance as he lip-synchs his song; often he makes recourse to the prop of a musical instrument, 'playing' the *veena*. The stars in their use of the musical then also embody two different aspects of phallic masculinity: firstly Mohan Lal in his dancing evokes the jack-in-the-box, clowning, popping up out of nowhere, 'surprise', almost comic, phallic style, as delineated in Garber's work on transvestite performance or explored in Kakar's analysis of the playful allure of Hindi actor Shammi Kapoor and hinted at in Cohan's discussion of the 'rise' of Fred Astaire (Garber 1992; Kakar 1989:37; Cohan 1993); here the phallus' unpredictability and ungovernability, its tendency to magical appearance and disappearance, is alluded to, which goes along with an admission or hint of its fallibility. The possibility of the actor—especially the dancing actor—using the whole body as phallus is also explored in Lal's playful dance and aggressive flirtatious teasing. On the other hand, with Mammootty we are faced with the phallus' fantasy image: rigid and impervious, reassuringly solid and constant. Perhaps nowhere more than in this question of dance (or 'no dance') styles do the two actor's differences become apparent. The differentiated phallic styles which the actors embody—the magical but fallible versus the perfect but forever unattainable—correspond to what fans perceive of the pair as stars. For Lal partisans, Mohan Lal is the true star, whose imperfections are acknowledged and help bring him into intimacy with us, whereas Mammootty is unapproachably immaculate and invulnerable. Among Mammootty partisans, their hero is an example of perfection achieved through self-crafting and discipline, while Mohan Lal is disappointingly frail.

Masculinities are always nuanced through—or, following Hall and Fernandes, experienced via modalities of—class and ethnic identities: 'race is … the modality in which class is 'lived' '(Hall 1980, cited in Bradley 1996:126; cf. Fernandes 1997:6). This brings us back to the assertion—common to the point of banality in that one hears it over and over—that Mohan Lal is the 'average Malayali' or 'Malayali alter ego'. Lal, remember,

is strongly identifiable as Travancore high-caste Hindu (Nayar), while Mammootty is equally strongly coded as 'Muslim' and as from Cochin. A modern post-unification 'Malayali' identity must encompass all three of Kerala's major communities and all three of its regions. Yet if Lal can be seen as the prototypical Malayali, this confirms for us the dominance—or attempt to claim dominance?—of south Kerala, Travancore (where the modern state capital Thiruvananthapuram is located) over other regions, and of Hindu—particularly Nayar—identities over others. Playing into this are Malayali ethnic stereotypes especially prevalent among dominant Hindu communities in which Muslims are represented as especially 'backward', unable or unwilling to participate fully in Kerala's modernist reform programmes involving full literacy and education (including womenfolk) and the two-child norm with post-partum sterilisation after the second child (cf. Devika 2002). Christians in this fantasy ethnic landscape are represented as too modern, willing to ignore demands of family and tradition in their eagerness to make money and permitting their womenfolk a dangerous and scandalous degree of freedom. If film and gender theory's dominant masculinity is actually—despite its claims to universality—one local version, then here we have another local version of dominance, which is both eliding and suppressing aberrant (local) others. At the same time, if we follow the suggestion that films speak to a nation's dreams of modernity, the presentation of Lal—Travancore Hindu—as 'the average Malayali alter-ego' suggests a dominant reading in which Muslims and Christians are figured out of the picture for being, respectively, not modern enough or too modern. Mohan Lal—said to be, remember, reassuringly always himself, no matter what role he takes—is then called upon to represent 'Malayali man': a fantasy image of dominant Hindu masculinity which is able to maintain a core stable self underneath many changes, negotiating a successful and 'correct' middle way through the demands of modernity (Jayamanne 1992; Eleftheriotis 1995).

If Lal is the explicitly acknowledged alter ego, Mammootty then appears as the unacknowledged other self. The implications of Mammootty's Muslimness brings us to Roy's analysis of the Muslim actress Nargis, who famously played the role of the 'ideal Indian woman' Radha in the classic blockbuster film, 'Mother India'. Roy argues that the film—in which 'Indian' becomes elided into 'Hindu'—acts as nationalist allegory for the repudiation of Muslim difference. The national fantasy ethnic identity requirement of an enactment of repudiation of Muslimness then means that 'only a Muslim can assume the iconic position' and take the role of the perfect Hindu woman (1998:168). Mammootty the Muslim in his reassuring

competence at playing the Hindu (in e.g. 'Nayarsaab', the prototypically dominant Malayali Hindu identity) then simultaneously bolsters the dominance of 'Hindu' as the modal Malayali ethnic identity and acts out what Roy identifies as the duty of the minority: 'the abjected who must compulsively … keep enacting their good citizenship', by performing as the 'good Muslim', the one who is able to assuage all anxiety about sinister difference by successfully erasing all signs of that difference.

Mammootty's knack of being 'totally believable' when playing Hindus and his alleged especial ability to play Christians (Kerala's 'other others')—an ability mentioned by many Christian and as well as Hindu fans (see e.g. 'Kottayam Kunnachan')—suggests yet another aspect of this star's special relationship with otherness: that of especial mastery of difference. The suggestion that Mammootty is somehow possessed of special powers of transformation is reinforced by the often made comment that another Mammootty speciality is to take an apparently negative role and transform it into a positive one. A famous example of this process is his portrayal of Chandu in the classic historical, 'Oru Vadakkan Veera Katha'. Here, he takes on a character familiar to all Malayalis from folklore—where Chandu is depicted as a scheming, jealous traitor—and re-works the traditional story to show the events and motivations behind action. It is the treachery of others, the broken promises and unfair treatment suffered, which led to his final act of murder, itself refigured in the film as an act of self-defence gone accidentally wrong. If Mohan Lal trades in images of the villain with a heart of gold, Mammootty explores the same territories of ambivalence, but does so with reference to a more complexly figured interior landscape and a far more encompassing and richly textured relationship with the figure of the other/outsider. He reminds us of Roy's comments about the (similarly linguistically gifted 1998:18) and excessively mimetic Sir Richard Burton, the colonial adventurer who was a 'byword for … cross-cultural impersonation' (1998:17); 'wherever he goes, he signifies a pervasive liminality, if not a pervasive alterity' (1998:32). This also evokes Taussig's remarks on the mimetic as that which is similar—not similar to anything, just similar (1993). Unlike Mohan Lal, whose fans enjoy his films as 'three hours with Mohan Lal himself', Mammootty is a master of mimetism and transformation. If we feel that we cannot really know him, it is because he is never actually there. In contrast to Mohan Lal's reported 'star presence', Mammootty is bewilderingly enigmatic.

Conclusions: Masculine Styles

Dyer notes, of Hollywood, 'Stars were gods and goddesses, heroes, models—embodiments of ideal ways of being. In the later period, however, stars are identification figures, people like you and me' (Dyer 1998:22). Of such a mixture of familiarity and otherness, proximity and distance, is the ideal modern hero made. As work on stardom has gone beyond issues such as consistency and imputation of character or presenting stars as relatively stable constellations of characteristics or styles, more recent analyses (similarly to Garber on the lure of the transvestite performance or Lott on Elvis impersonators) stress the very unpredictability and complexity of the performer to whom desire attaches (Garber 1992; Lott 1997). In the end, if Mohan Lal appears to command bigger box office and act more successfully as an all-round 'star', his success may eventually be due to his famous 'flexibility' as much as the specific and obvious appeal which he holds based upon perceived affinity with the cinema-going classes or with Malayali fantasy ethnic identity as coded in its dominant 'modern Travancore Hindu' modality. In contrast to Mammootty's anxiety-provoking capacities for transformation, Mohan Lal's flexibility suggests qualities of mutability permitting him to embody a variety of interesting and alluring imaginary positions with which to play, while always remaining safely anchored to a stable and recognisable core identity as 'Mohan Lal'. He thus assuages young men's anxieties about identity by offering the spectacle of stability, which can assimilate changes without threat to self—a dividual self, which is anchored by an essential core. If rites of passage do not exist or are not deemed enough; if one's efforts at being a 'breadwinner' are exhausting and always subject to being over-shadowed by others', more lavish, providing; if contemporary Kerala culture threatens to overwhelm and render irrelevant such masculine archetypes as were useful for previous generations; then Lal at least, in his imperfect but ultimately competent negotiations through life, offers some comfort.

At the same time, if Mammootty embodies and offers entries into extraordinariness (beauty, talent), otherness and transformation, and the possibilities of crafting a more perfected and masculinized self, Mohan Lal offers the reassuring spectacle of the regular guy, just like the fan, who hits the big-time. One might wish to be like Mammootty but often feels that one already is in some way like Mohan Lal. Fans consistently maintain that Lal conducts an 'ordinary life' and is an 'ordinary person', something which cannot hold credibility when spoken of about a highly paid movie star, but which offers another point of focus for thinking about Lal's popular appeal and the type of star he is. 'Naturalness' and 'authenticity' occur over and

over when talking about Lal—his manner, dance rhythm, walk, smile, myriad imperfections and so on. Lal appears then as an elevation of the ordinary via the hyper-ordinary towards the extraordinary: he is at once the guy just like me and the guy who has natural talent in every direction—his success can augur mine. Mammootty is a necessary complement to this figure, in his aspects as the always already—by virtue of innate otherness—truly and authentically extraordinary: both perfectly other and a perfect other.

Finally, Kerala's young male fans—literate, articulate, sophisticated—work with a fiercely defended fantasy ethnicized self-image, which sets them apart from the passionate and putatively simple Tamil or Telugu movie fan. While Tamil fans may self-immolate on the death of a star; while Telugu fans will tattoo a star's name onto their arms, the Malayali fan will switch sides and change fan association at will. And while Tamil fans affected to overlook or be unaware of their hero MGR's balding and fat countenance, Malayali fans at once revel in Lal's imperfections and claim him as their own doppelganger. While young men repeat *dialogue* and copy hairstyles, follow *cinema* fashions and modify their walks, they maintain a sense that this is all play, a matter of aesthetics and surfaces. The fragmentations of ethnic and class modalities inherent within the two-star universe eventually have the potential to unify at the higher level of the fantasized and aspired towards 'Malayali' identity: different both from other Indians and from other southerners, marked out by its relationships to modernity, education and cultural sophistication, endowed with a deep sense of irony and reflexivity. This 'Malayali' identity is, by sleight of hand, assimilated into a dominant community's vision of itself. Travancore Hindu man comes to be Malayali man, and is held to be flexible yet stable, and treading an ideal path through the modern world: neither reluctant nor too eager to embrace modernity. He does not pretend perfection, but is reassuringly fallible and approachable, generally triumphant but often only through a willingness to transgress the rules and confront power with force. In youthful male fan activity, this cultivated Malayali ethnic identity then articulates with the fan's subject position as fledgling man testing out various masculine aesthetics and permits Malayali young men to develop a keen appreciation of the fluidity and artificiality of masculine identities. Masculinity finally appears as masquerade, a suggestion echoed in recent gender analyses.

Arguments from Joan Riviere onwards have theorized femininity as masquerade (e.g. Riviere 1929; Butler 1999:43–57). In Lacanian theory, which influences sexual difference theory, language and the symbolic are said to be structured in such a way that gender is inevitably written into

them from the outset. The gender binary inscribed into the symbolic is one that works around the sign of the phallus as master signifier. The masculine is associated with the phallus, while the feminine is associated with lack. But actually gender manoeuvres are always doomed to fail: man can never have the phallus and woman can never be it. In this sense, all gender performances are inauthentic, written under the sign of lack. Men have no actual access to the phallus any more than do women. Ethnography suggests to us that we must in thinking about masculinity move away from varieties of post-Lacanian sexual difference theory, which posit asymmetry and acknowledge that, just as much as femininity, masculinity is also usefully theorized as masquerade. The dividual self seeks illusions of wholeness and presence through the masquerade, folding into its imagined 'core self' the alluring characteristics of the hyper masculine star, fusing imagined self and other to produce a series of dizzying and dazzling performances—some, to be sure, more convincing than others.

Mammootty and Mohan Lal embody and perform different styles of manliness, none of which one would want to dispense with in one's potential repertoire as a fledgling man testing out new subject positions and public personas. The masculine self is—like all possible selves—complex, shifting, internally plural, inconsistent: masculinity is never achieved, always performed and necessarily open to question and change. We can think of Malayali *payyan*s as located in a mimetic economy, in which they take and exchange characteristics, parts of self and other, with their on-screen heroes and with each other. The Malayali young man reproduces and newly fashions over each generation and with each shift in masculine style what it means to be a Malayali man, negotiating the demands of modernity and finding a way to move through the various arenas—family, work, leisure—around him.

Notes

1. Several early readers of this paper have noted correspondences between the two star figures here and the archetypes of Ram (or Shiva) and Krishna. While we also noted such correspondences, which undoubtedly exist and surely hold psychic and emotional relevance for certain sections of the Malayali population, we choose not to pursue this line of argument. As Srivastava notes, in his introduction to his special issue of the journal South Asia, 'it is not clear ... that analytical recourse to *The Laws of Manu* ... is adequate to an understanding of the ... present' (2004a: 3).
2. We take strong issue with Dickey's Marxist-inspired work on Tamil cinema (Dickey 1993, 2001). Pandian (1992) and Rogers (2005) give a more nuanced and sensitive analysis of the ambivalences inherent in popular culture.
3. Of course there are many stylistic differences, which one would want to take into

account in a study of form in the medium.

4. There are several other websites dealing with what is known affectionately by NRIs as 'Malluwood': http://members.tripod.com/mcinema2 is one good one; http://members.xoom.com/_XMCM/suma_praveen is another.
5. There are several female actors, but informants agreed that none of them are 'stars' in the way that male actors can become. Some women offered reasons as rooted in scriptwriters' and directors' inability or unwillingness to come up with decent parts for women; others with the transient and limited nature of the female acting career, which is much shorter and linked more closely to youthful physical glamour.
6. In this he might appear to mirror Amitabh Bachchan, but actually has quite a different style, being equally noted for comedy, romance and dance.
7. As we go to press in 2006, an exciting and unexpected development is Mammootty's appearances in the film 'Rajamannikkam' and as the eponymous hero of 'Thuruppugulan'. In both these new movies, Mammootty takes on the role of gambling, lady-killing and - notably - dancing hero. We have not yet seen these performances, but trailers we have seen suggest an entirely new and playfully sexy side of Mammootty coming out here.
8. This could lead us into long-standing debates in film and gender theories about the differences between masquerade, camp, drag and so on (see e.g. Medhurst 1997; Meyer 1994). We choose to sidestep such debates for lack of space.
9. We note that Mammootty himself has sometimes suggested this in interviews.
10. While we personally find Tamil movies often far more entertaining than Malayalam ones - certainly the music and dance is more finely developed - this line between Kerala and other southern styles is grossly overstated by Malayalis, as are other aspects (clothing, speech) of alleged Malayali superior difference.
11. Again, Muraleedharan's queer reading provides food for thought, in citing two films in which Mohan Lal kisses Mammootty, further complicating the dialectic whereby the pair are separated (distinguished) from each other and joined together (2001:183).
12. We acknowledge that this remains simply one possible reading - not necessarily 'correct' in all cases, but available as a possible response. Gayatri Gopinath has recently produced convincing arguments for the presence of very strong queer currents in 'Bollywood', 2005.
13. cf. Halberstram (1998) on female masculinities and the detachment of 'masculinity' from 'men'.
14. There are of course gossip and photos in movie magazines and on the www, but actresses do not attract even 10 per cent of the attention lavished upon Mammootty and Mohan Lal.
15. Male discomfort with confronting homoerotic elements is commonly dealt with, according to Neale, by means of violence. This serves both to repress the desire to use another male as erotic spectacle and—as when action heroes strip and fight—enabling the spectacle.
16. The extraordinarily complex and unpredictable nature of the directions in which attraction and desire may flow is exemplified by Penley's analysis of slash literature produced by female Star Trek fans, in which fans produce and consume fantasy images and narratives of masculine homosexual desire—typically between Captain Kirk and Mr Spock (1990). Eve Sedgwick's empathy for—to the point of identification with - gay men, and Judith Halberstam's manifesto for a masculinity

which is not male-identified are just two more examples of how we cannot take gendered subjectivities for granted and we certainly cannot assume that they are simplistically 'as they should be' (1998).

17. And interestingly, he is the star identified by Muraleedharan as being the more easily read queerly (2002).
18. Hindu fan anxieties about Muslim Indianness—as problematic ethnicity or untrustworthy state loyalty—were being fanned in Kerala (as elsewhere in India) from the late 1980s onwards with the rise of Hindutva rhetoric from groups such as BJP and RSS. Doubts about their hero are assuaged by the common fan story that Mammootty donated 2 lakhs to the Kargill effort against Pakistan.
19. We will deal more in our forthcoming manuscript with Muslim self-stereotyping and reactions to these common images of themselves.
20. The position is most clear of course in regard to Hindus and Muslims; while Christians do, we find, share Hindu stereotypes of Muslims, Christians' own self-perceived community-specific qualities (*swabhavangal*)—which include decisiveness and determination, a degree of forcefulness—place them in a slightly different position.
21. We stress that, as elsewhere in India, this imagination of 'Muslimness' is an anxious fantasy stereotype.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusions

We began this book with a question: how do you make a man? Our first answer came by way of assertions from an elite community that their esoteric and exclusivist rituals effect radical transformations by turning low-status boys into hegemonic twice-born elite men. Yet this assertion was immediately undermined: both by the men themselves, who ruefully admit that to be initiated is not enough, that successful and repeated performances of dominant masculinity are needed; and by males from other communities, who manage to claim 'manhood' without the practice of initiation and who are moreover oriented towards styles of masculinity quite different from the Brahmin, suggesting that perhaps we should not speak of 'hegemonic masculinity' in such a richly plural society.

Yet against this fragmenting tendency, Chapters 3 and 4 highlighted over and over the existence of consensus around the set of characteristics needed if one is to make accomplished performances and stake claims to consistent and successful masculine status. We found that earning and bringing money home, providing dependents and making wise use of the money—as in house-building—have become core preoccupations for men across all communities over the 20th century. Brahminical values of renunciation, austerity and purity are sidelined even among Brahmins in favour of decidedly this—worldly demonstrations of masculine competence. This competence is expected to anticipate or realize one's role as heterosexual householder, with sexuality and providing as its twin poles. Brahminical purity, still essential to the maintenance of broad caste hierarchies, runs into tension with the demands of dominant contemporary styles of masculinity. Eating meat, drinking and smoking are commonly seen as signs of a 'red-blooded male'; even conservative parents often say—'Oh, he doesn't drink, smoke or eat meat—then he is hardly a man!' (*avanoranalla*)—with a certain sexual connotation[1].

Contemporary young men's most difficult move into the terrain of masculine competition is that of trying to find well-paying employment—in Kerala, as in many parts of the world, a process that may require years of study, making contacts, moving around the region and re-defining the self and its orientation to job markets. Indeed, we have observed across our years in Kerala since the 1980s a constantly-shifting landscape of agencies purporting to pass on to young men skills, which will fit them for employment. And young men we know have undertaken a bewildering variety of such courses, ever-hopeful of improving their curriculum vitae (CV) and getting an edge over the thousands of others in the job market. One friend of ours—not untypical—has matriculation, degree, two masters' degrees, diplomas in television repair and computer programming, driving licence, a post-graduate certificate in public health and professional qualifications in catering and hotel work from a tourism institute. Lately, we notice ever more esoteric and specialized diplomas springing up around the private study institutes to which families in Kerala give so much of their money on behalf of their young men. 'Personality development courses' are, as we write in 2005, all the rage, but they will undoubtedly be superseded by something else deemed a useful embellishment to a CV. Worker, breadwinner, provider do seem to be characteristics around which dominant masculinity coalesces.

While we can delineate several styles of masculinity and competing aesthetics (e.g. the vegetarian teetotaller versus the meat-eating 'party' man), marriage and setting up home is unquestionably necessary for all men, part of the doxa—the utterly taken for granted (Bourdieu 1990). And marriage here also implies several other things, notably the presence of a 'housewife' wife (she will be so whether she does paid employment or not), who will bring respect to the family and act as a reflection of her husband's success. This reinvigoration and universalisation of the Hindu 'householder' ethic into a modern 'breadwinner' is characterized by the imposition of a strictly gendered division of labour, which overlooks or deplores women's work and financial contributions, keeps 'real men' out of the kitchen and in the living room, and insists upon a two-sex pair as the foundation of the valorized modern household.

Chapters 5 and 6 then explored the production of this two-sex pair. While marriage is an issue of gender and adult status, family prestige, economic necessity and so on, it also involves the harnessing of two young people's intimate spaces and emotions. The relative empowerment of the young compared to 50 years ago means that they are never coerced but are persuaded to marry. One way in which this happens is through hints at the

pleasures of sex, an activity that is made difficult for the unmarried by way of both social structures and by codes of feminine decency which young women are enjoined to perform. Another way in which, for the moment especially women, but also to a degree young men, are brought into marriage is through the beginnings of the elaboration of ideas about love not—as classically expressed—as something outside of and quite separate from marriage but as something intrinsic to it, albeit properly happening after the wedding in an arranged marriage to a stranger. We explored some of the ways in which cross-sex relations are eroticized and romanticized and some of the dynamics—such as flirting, officially taboo but tacitly permitted—which fashion people into willing heterosexual subjects. Film has played a large part over the 20th century in kindling the desire for *love* and in shaping its aesthetics; we expect that television will play an increasingly important role in the 21st century.

While film songs have always stood outside of the main part of the Indian movie and existed especially to speak to deeper (sometimes inarticulable) fantasies, already since the 1990s cable TV explosion, we find an intensification of the effects of this piece of media. In place of a pre-1990s once-weekly offering of 'film songs' on state-run TV (*Chitrahaar*), young men and women are now able to choose all day and every day from a series of MTV type programmes, in which music videos from Hindi pop are played alongside film songs from Malayalam and Tamil movies. While young men may keenly feel arising in themselves the sentiments of "*Ennikku oru girlfriend veenam*" (the Tamil song "I need/want a girlfriend", from the movie 'Boys'), still gender segregation and expectations of virginity exist and any 'girlfriend' one may find may well limit herself to sending fairly chaste letters. Marriage is eventually the only way of approaching satisfaction of the romantic and (hetero) sexual fantasies elicited among young men and women.

We have argued strongly throughout that alongside the doxa of and strong structures of heteronormativity have existed homosocial arenas, two of which (pilgrimage and film fan activity) are discussed closely in Chapters 6 and 7. Ethnography suggests that tensions exist between these parallel worlds of same-sex and cross-sex relations and that men are being urged to relegate their enjoyment of same-sex relations to strictly curtailed time periods and locations. Yet still, homosocial arenas and the quiet intimacy of closed family spaces provide refuges from the demands of public, heterosexual masculinity and may yet offer spaces where same sex relationships of various flavours may flourish. Contemporary processes favouring the alignment of gender status, sexual practice and affective

inclination under the institution of marriage (and, at society's cutting-edge, in terms of 'choice' and love marriage) are not all-encompassing.

An emerging gay movement is challenging existing practices and insisting upon sexuality as singular and as identity—a move Gayatri Gopinath refers to as 'homonormative' (2005:21). This then stands in contrast to pre-existing and widespread understandings of sexual activity (i.e. not 'sexuality') as behaviour and as in no way expressive of some privileged secret inner self. In the midst of current arguments about 'gay rights' or public representation and the appeal to a category 'gay', heterosexuality is also being thrown into relief and its lineaments fashioned. The terminology and categorising practices of a gobal 'homo: hetero' opposition are making inroads; 'sexuality' may be on the way to becoming an unshakeable cornerstone of south Asian gender identity (Cohen 2005; Srivastava in press). The performances of masculinity which will be required of men if this happens will become more stringent, the self-policing of desire relentless and the self-consciousness about homosocial spaces heavy.

Where heterosexuality—marriage, the normative household—is figured as compulsory, gender and sexuality may be drawn strongly together. Yet gendering, affective relations and sexual practice have not necessarily always been brought together in local configurations of self and desire in south Asian society across history. 'Mother' and 'man', not 'husband' and 'wife' or 'heterosexual partners' have stood at centre of gendered adult categories, with 'man' nuanced by occupation, caste and so on (Osella 1993). Marriage has been up until colonial reforms of matriliny a contested or even a non-category, in complex pre-colonial systems of strategic and sometimes multiple serial alliances. And there have always been significant spaces in which gender, sexuality, desire, friendship and so on have been allowed to take a greater and more convoluted variety of routes than the direct and singular one increasingly now prescribed.

Gopinath has recently explored the ways in which contemporary feminist films and 'emancipated' heroines are brought out in Indian cinema at the expense of female sexuality and are accompanied by women's entry into a narrowly defined heteronormativity (2005). The spaces in which the 'emancipated' Indian woman moves are purged out of any trace of the 'unemancipated' woman's homosocial and lesbian relationships and desires. This is part of a set of wider conservative moves, for example: "An Indian immigrant male bourgeoisie … reconstitutes Hindu nationalist discourses of belonging in India by interpellating "India" as Hindu, patriarchal, middle-class and free of homosexuals" (2005:17). At the same moment as queer female desire becomes utterly unthinkable, queer male desire becomes

permissible—but only in diasporic contexts and only if circumscribed and framed as clearly subordinate to normative heterosexual identities. As Gopinath remarks, "the consignment of queer male desire to diasporic space serves only to solidify the heteronormativity of the home space of the nation'" (2005:192). Gopinath's argument is an important and more generalisable one, not relevant simply to analysis of film.

While early 20th century literature explored the 'new woman' and ideas about a new style of relationship—basically, companionate marriage—these ideals were not taken up nor taken seriously outside a limited group of experimental intellectuals (Panikkar 1995). Yet now, as global styles of youth culture spread through TV and new consumption practices like going for ice-cream as a couple (without the wider family) spread, young people are shifting their expectations of marriage and tuning themselves into the possibilities of married intimacy even as they tune out other relationships. Marie Percot reports that Malayali nurses working away in the Gulf are keen to throw off obligations and ties to wider family and switch to a narrower focus on the nuclear household group (Percot 2006). They perceive being enmeshed in wider family, along with other markers such as insistence on 'Kerala dress', as factors holding them back from the modernity and freedom they desire; the high incidence of *love marriage* among Kerala Gulf nurses is an index of this desire. We expect to see in future an intensification of the tendency to shut down even further such alternative (and even potentially dissident) avenues of emotional and sexual contact as friends, in-laws and cousins, under a regime in which 'love after marriage' or even 'love marriage' spreads across south Asia.

Malayali female nurses speak to Marie Percot about the freedom they imagine they would have if and when they 'escape' Kerala and the wider old-style family obligations and manage instead to shift to a nuclear family at a safe distance from home—in the Gulf or, preferably, in the U.S.A.[2]. Yet Sheba George's ethnography of Malayali Christian nurses who have migrated to the U.S.A. suggests that the 'freedom' gained by those who buy in to ideals of a modern marriage and family turn out often to consist of suffocation and isolation in a nuclear household, relentless hard work and extreme anxiety about gendering (2005). Working and earning nurses are constrained to make extra efforts in their performances of 'decent'—appropriately Indian—femininity. Their husbands—Malayali males—also come under pressure to make successful and appropriate performances of gender; they are at once implicated in tight heterosexual relations in nuclear families, but unable to assert 'provideer' status. Many have turned to the church as an arena where worth and status can be asserted and where

women can be excluded and (temporarily) ignored in favour of male sociality and solidarity. Some dependent husbands use women as the grounds to forge their own masculinity, for example, in becoming the patriarchs their wives imagined as belonging to the 'traditional' past. Rather than cosy companionate love and a democratic relationship, women may find that 'modern' family life results in menfolks' aggressive assertions of power within the nuclear family and a greater antagonism between the sexes. Men and women alike may find themselves circumscribed and required to make demanding performances of gender and heteronormativity.

Johnny Parry argues that Indian marriage is becoming more settled in contrast to the marital histories of the older generation, some of whom enjoyed serial relationships on the understanding that marriage was a matter of pragmatism, not affection or lifetime domesticity. He sees the new style Indian marriage—putatively stable, with intimations of companionship and permanency—as a progressive move and as opening up possibilities of intimacy, empathy and so on (2004). But, Shalini Grover shows how love marriage and nuclear families worsen women's position considerably when compared to older—more pragmatic and less demanding—forms of marriage, which did not involve expectations of intimacy, exclusivity or normalized bourgeois domesticity (2005). We must ask then—in what ways do the new expectations of marriage constrain both women and men? And what are the effects of such changes on people's emotional and sexual repertoires?

In a parallel—substantially different, but structurally similar—move to Gopinath's argument about women, who gain feminism and emancipation at the price of homosocial relationships[3], it appears to us that men gain the position of 'head of the family' in a neo-patriarchal hegemonic family, while simultaneously losing a wider web of possible relationships and being channelled uncompromisingly into making the heterosexual commitment. Along with this goes an imagined stability and consistency to gendered personhood, which can only (in the face of fragmented reality) provoke greater anxiety about performance and intensify competition between menfolk.

If an identity in which masculinity becomes sutured to heterosexuality is one pole of contemporary gendering, then the other pole (which is of course connected, via the institutions of marriage, the nuclear family and the 'breadwinner' ethos) is ever increasing consumption demands and expectations. Kerala has been famed throughout India and lauded by international development 'experts' for its success in promoting small

families. What is clear is that in Kerala, children are increasingly seen as costly liabilities at the same time as they become the target of family social status ambitions. English-medium private schooling is now widespread even among low-earning families. The entry of branded clothing and expectations that one's child(ren) will be fashionably dressed is another example of the fetishisation of the child as simultaneously product and embodiment of the status of the parental couple. Some families we know are sticking at not two but just one child, arguing that they can best concentrate father's money and mother's energy and time this way. And here, because earning remains a masculine duty, we point up the escalating demands on men's earning power. Devika suggests that with modernity, the figure of the 'earning wife' appears; the case is perhaps a little overstated in that while such a figure exists, it still does not represent a majority of married women and is respectable only so far as the woman in question is educated, in 'good' employment and so on. Still, outside of progressive educated urban circles, the 'housewife' whose husband provides the home totally by his own efforts is the ideal. And in any case, it is the man alone who will be judged on his ability to open up contemporary consumer culture to his own household.

We close this book with a recent Malayalam movie ('Chandupottu', directed by Lal Jose, Sept 2005)[4]. In 'Chandupottu', popular actor Dileep plays a gender-ambivalent male. Radha is a boy who has been brought up by his grandmother as a girl (because there were none in the family). He now enjoys cosmetics, female folk dance, 'weepy' TV serials' and a host of other feminine pleasures, even if he is often the butt of villagers' jokes. Radha rigorously wears the red '*pottu*', the Hindu woman's *bindi*, but he also sports a moustache, thereby offering us a confusing and excessive display of two of Kerala's most iconic gender symbols. When Radha and his 'best friend' Malu fall in love, Radha has to prove to himself, to his own and Malu's father and to the village that he can become a man and worthy husband.

This film then explicitly addresses the question of how to 'make a man', and in doing so openly and in exploring Radha's transition to proper masculine status, suggests to us that the larger part of masculinity is but masquerade, performance and not then reliant upon any essentialized nature[5]. Just as Radha learnt to love nail varnish and weepy movies, he can unlearn these characteristics and learn instead to fight, command and take his place in the world of competitive hierarchies of masculinity. This then appears to represent a non-essentialist approach to gender, which promises to free it from determinism and naturalism even as it insists upon a

normative performance. But on the other hand, the film does anchor and index Radha's 'real' underlying claims to masculinity from the outset to an essentialized biological sex, by means of the moustache—the hyper-signifier of south Indian masculinity[6]. While the *pottu* is applied daily—a feminine cosmetic—the moustache is grown from the inner body, and can be read as an outward leakage of inner maleness. Radha's falling in love with his girlfriend Malu can also be read as an assertion that 'true' gender—becoming, as we are arguing, tightly knit to sexuality under globalising regimes—will out. Yet this reading is also counterbalanced when we note that Radha turns to Malu only after two events: an attempted homosexual gang rape upon him; and advice from his mother that he should marry if he wishes to avoid trouble and be respected in society. The scene in which Radha turns to Malu also holds ambiguous suggestions of (feminine) identification between the two, in its use of mirrors.

In any case, the film has been praised in reviews for tackling a tough subject and dealing in a dignified and sensitive way with gender non-conformity (e.g. http://www.directkerala.com/movies/chandupottu.aspx. http://www. ApunKaChoice.com.). Yet even as the film undoubtedly raises for discussion a former taboo, it marginalizes and mocks gender dissidence and presumed sexual deviance by framing it within comedy (the Malayalam *mimic* tradition) and the distorted desires of a woman—the grandmother who longs for a girl child. And in the end, it remains crucial that the main axis of transformation, the motivation through which and means by which the effeminized Radha becomes a 'true man', is heterosexual love. Just as north Indian film heroines who are gender-inappropriate by virtue of being too 'modern' and 'westernized' are conventionally restored to sari—clad normality by means of heterosexual romance, so romance is the vehicle for Radha's turn towards proper gendering.

But even as we may take this apparently normative reading, still the film allows considerable slippage from its 'true (heterosexual) love makes a man' message. Firstly, there are suggestions of homoeroticism between Radha and the villain, and between Radha and the modern young man who comes to rescue him. Secondly, Radha's assertions of fighting prowess are rather half-hearted and it is the villagers in the finale who pitch in to help him when he is seen as clearly losing. And finally, even after his transformation into Malu's lover, Radha retains—as the film director admits—aspects of his femininity. He does not become an utterly transformed and fully masculine man. The film, then, offers a complex tiptoeing through several possibilities. It offers us an apparently strongly heteronormative resolution while simultaneously undermining claims to naturalness and essentialism in

gender and sexuality. It hints at muted but prevalent possibilities of homoeroticism and male femininities. And while it insists for resolution upon certain moves—marriage, becoming a wage-earner—it does not insist upon the total erasure of Radha's former persona or his femininity. It permits a degree of manoeuvre within gendering and the flows of sexual desire and affection, while underlining what we have throughout claimed as the 'bottom line' of contemporary masculinity—submission to the structures of public heteronormativity and acceptance of the responsibilities of the role of provideer. As such, it perfectly captures contemporary dilemmas of south Asian masculinity.

Notes

1. Thanks to Mahalaxmi Mahadevan for this point.
2. We are writing elsewhere about the construction among migrant Malayalis of a rhetorical difference triangle, which pits the sentimentalized but 'backward' homeland against the U.S.A. and the Gulf, regions perceived as hyper-modern and (respectively) Christian and Muslim in base culture, hence evaluated differently among migrants from different communities (Osella and Osella, paper on transnational families, currently in preparation).
3. An argument which shadows both generalized tensions in 'Western' feminism with regard to female sexuality and also the repudiation of 'old fashioned' lesbianism by many feminists (see e.g. Halberstam 1998:103; Rubin, in Weed and Schor 1997:80).
4. We are very grateful to Muraleedharan Tharayil for discussions of this film; while we may draw different conclusions, we benefit from Murali's deep knowledge of Malayalam films and the techniques of film analysis.
5. It does the same for femininity, of course, in its claim that a boy could be made to grow up so much like a girl as a result of socialisation. We leave aside here for lack of space arguments about how masculinity can, like femininity, be theorized through the concept of masquerade. We are currently writing at length on this issue (Osella and Osella, paper on 'cinematic dance and the expansion of gender and sexual repertoires', currently in preparation)..
6. cf. http://www.sepiamutiny.com/archives/2005_12.html, where the female writer muses on Malayali "Macho Meesha'd (moustached) Men" and on the ubiquitousness of facial hair among her male relatives, movie stars and so on.

GLOSSARY

Aanu	male
Aazhitullal	fire-walking
Abhishekam	ritual washing of Hindu deity (with milk, water etc).
Abkari	liquor trade
Ammayude maya	the goddess' play
Amritha	nectar, ambrosia
Araatu	holy immersion bath
Artha	realm of wealth and political advantage
Ashrama	life-stage
Avan or' analla	he is not a male
Avarna	outside of the fourfold Varna system of caste—'untouchable'
Bali	sacrifice
Bandhukkal	relatives
Bhajana	devotional song
Bhakti	devotion
Bidis	locally made (rustic) cigarettes
Bindi	adhesive coloured spot worn by women on forehead (see also pottu)
Blade	money-lender
Brahmacharya	celibate renouncer
Buddhi	intelligence, good sense
Charakku	commodity, good
Cheetha pennungal	bad girls/women
Cherukkan	boy, youth
Chettathiamma	elder brother's wife (Hindus)
Chettu	sharp, stylish or showy
Coolie	manual labour(er)
Dakshina	ritual payment (Hindu)
Dal	lentil broth
Darshan	sight of Hindu deity

Deepharadana	culmination of Hindu worship—passing of camphor flame before deity and worshippers.
Devadasi	temple dancer/courtesan
Dharma	path of morality/law
Dharmasastric	laid down in Hindu texts
Dhat	semen-loss
Dialogue	especially popular spoken exchange in a film
Dishum-dishum	fighting, violence in films
Don	thug or underworld big-man
Dosham	fault, sin, imperfection
Ennikku oru girlfriend veenam	I want/need a girlfriend
Filmi	pertaining to Indian movies
Gayatri mantra	particularly powerful Hindu sacred verse
Ghee	clarified butter
Goonda	see also don; thug or criminal leader's henchman
Grehastya	householder—the second ashrama
Gulfan/pl. Gulfanmar	migrant(s) to one of the Gulf states
Gunam	quality, tendency
Guru	adviser, leader
Gurudi	blood sacrifice
Guruswami	leader of group of Sabarimala sannyasis
Heroes	male leading actors in cinema
Hijras	transvestite males, sometimes castrated
Hindutva	Hindu nationalism/fundamentalism
Homakundam	fire sacrifice
Illa	is not, is no
Irumudi kettu	two pouches tied up
Ishtadevata	favourite deity
Jackie	a form of physical sexual harassment
Jada	flashy, showing-off
Jati	caste, community
Joli	salaried employment
Kali	play
Kallan/pl. Kallanmar	thief; tricky person; cheat; 'too clever by half'
Kangany	labour broker
Kanni	inexperienced; virgin
Kanniswami	first-time pilgrim to the Sabrimala shrine
Karanavan	senior male in matrilineal joint family; holds resources and authority and wields power over all

	other household members
Koolippani	manual labour; daily wage labour
Kothi	effeminate male who has sex with other males
Krishippani	agricultural labour
Kshatriya	the warrior/ruler/jati
Kshauram	first hair cutting ceremony
Kundalini	inner channel where shakti may flow
Ladies' items/Ladies' saddanangal	hairclips, bindis etc.
Lakshman rekha	protective boundary line
Licence	sanction to have sex
Line	flirting relationship
Love	romantic and passionate feelings (cf. sneham, prem, piyar, srngaram)
Lover	illicit romantic and/or sexual partner
Lungi	colourful cloth worn from waist to ankle
Madamma	white woman
Mahishi	female buffalo
Makara jyothi/Makaravilakku	light appearing atop the Sabarimala hill in the Malayalam month of makaram
Manam	dignity, prestige
Manasilla	don't have the mind for it
Mandala	40 day cycle
Mandapam	canopied stage, gazebo
Mantra	sacred verbal formula
Mantravadam	sorcery, evil magic
Maya	play, illusion
Meesha	moustache
Mimic	impersonation; stand-up comedy
Moksha	escape from cycle of rebirth and death
Muhurtam	auspicious time
Mukti	escape from cycle of rebirth and death
Mundu	white cloth worn from waist to ankle
Nalukettu	traditional teak house with balconies and porches
Nanam	shame, embarassment
Nava rasas	the nine savours
Nercha	vow
Ni	you (2nd pers. Sing; to child, animal or person of lower status, disrespectful).
Ningal	you (2nd pers. Pl.; to adult, person of equal or

	higher status)
Pakuthi nammal, pakuthi daivam	“half from us and half from God”
Panchayat	committee, council
Pandal	canopied stage; see also mandapam
Pani	labour; manual work
Panthi	strongly masculine man; ostensibly heterosexual but may have sex with other men.
Pardah	veiling; seclusion
Party	celebration, may be simply sharing tea or sweets
Pavam, pl. Pavangal	innocent; fool; good-hearted or soft person
Pavan mala	long necklace made entirely of gold sovereigns
Payyan, pl. Payyanmar	young man; boy; unmarried youth
Pennu	female
Pottu	spot (conventionally red and circular) worn on women’s foreheads
Prasadam	offerings made to Hindu deity, blessed and returned to devotees
Prem	lasting and serious love/devotion (cf sneham, love, piyar)
Progressinu vendi	for the sake of progress; in search of progress
Puja	Hindu rite of worship
Pujari	Hindu temple priest
Pumsnavan	tamarind juice drinking ceremony during mid- pregnancy
Pyar	romantic love (cf. prem, sneham, love, srngaram)
Rasnadippodi	ayurvedic medicinal ash preparation
Romance	a love relationship not expected to lead to marriage; usually sexless
Saippu	white man
Shakti	power; manifested in goddesses; associated with women
Samavartanam	end of initiatory period
Sambar	lentil and vegetable hot and sour stew
Sambhasanam	especially popular spoken exchange in a film
Sampradaya	sect of renouncers
Samskaram	life-cycle ritual
Sannyas	renunciation
Sannyasi	renouncer/celibate

Saranam	shelter, refuge
Sari	woman's six-metre cloth wrapped as dress
Sasral	woman's husband's house
Savarna	within the fourfold caste grouping
Scene catching	spying unobserved on scenes of nudity or sex
Self-help club	boys' mutual masturbation
Shawl	veil worn across bosom
Sneham	lasting affection and care; familial love (cf. Prem, love, piyar, srngaram)
Soaping	flattering; giving gifts to 'soften up'.
Social worker	one who helps others for no financial reward
Sodhasa kriyas	Brahminical life-cycle rites
Srngaram	passionate love (cf. Love, prem, piyar, sneham)
Sthanam	relative social position; rank; prestige
Sudra	third Varna in fourfold Varna system; not twice-born
Swami	holy man
Tali	gold pendant tied by the groom on the bride's neck in a Hindu marriage
Tantra	sacred ritual actions
Thaan paathi, daivam paathi	you do half and God will do half
Tharavadu	Hindu joint family house; ancestral home
Thiruvabharanam	holy gold jewellery
Tol	deerskin belt
Treat	sweets or drinks offered to share good fortune
Tune	initiate flirting; make eye contact and chat
Udyogam	salaried permanent position
Unniappam	honey-soaked dough balls
Upanayanam	sacred thread giving ceremony
Vaayi nokki/Vaayi nottam	layabout; girl-watching; idling; do-nothing
Vanaprastha	4^{th} stage of Hindu life-cycle in classical texts
Vandi	vehicle
Varna	one of four large caste groupings
Veda	sacred text
Veena	stringed musical instrument
Vratam	vow of abstinence

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